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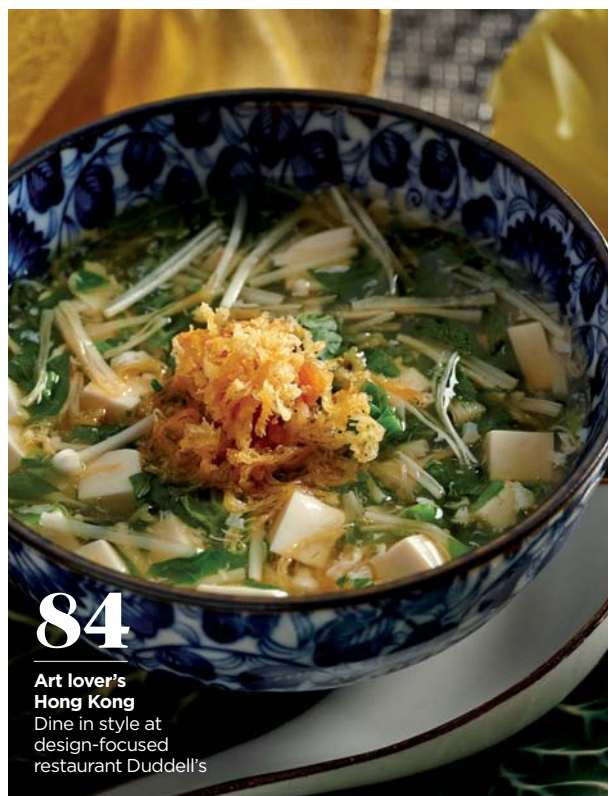
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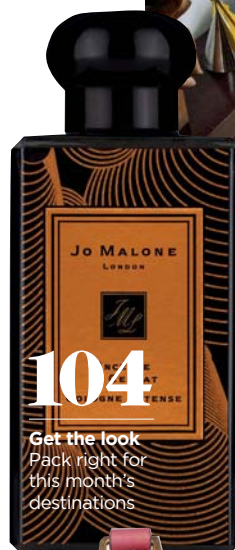
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ON THE COVER



Photographed by Lisa Limer at Phulay Bay, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve in Krabi Province

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EDITOR'S LETTER

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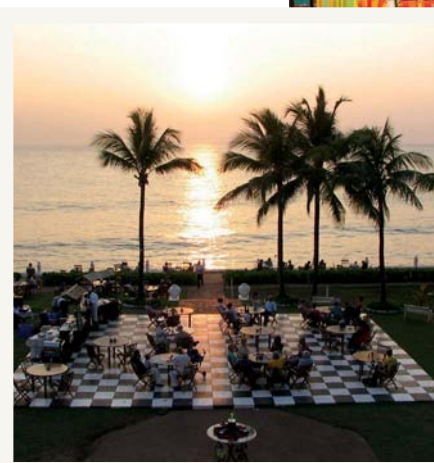


TRUTH IN TRAVEL

This is our promise to the reader to be an essential source of honest opinion and must-have information. You can trust *Condé Nast Traveller* to give you the unbiased inside track, with integrity and authority.

There was this moment, around 2am, standing by the short wall separating me from the ocean, listening to the waves crash against the rocks below, with a background track of laughter, electronic beats and clinking glasses, that I stopped to think about just how much fun I was having in Colombo. It was New Year's Eve, a night I generally don't hold in much regard, but out here on the edge of the ocean at the historic Galle Face Hotel, it seemed like a perfectly good night.

The feeling was really the culmination of several good days involving excellent eating – hoppers with curry, an endless variety of spicy *sambol*, crustacean feasts at the Ministry of Crab – some local shopping (at Barefoot: floaty, primary-coloured dresses and elegant handmade paper); and early evening strolls along the promenade at Galle Face Green, where street vendors sell all manner of “short eats” (snacks), like prawns atop lentil crackers and green mangoes sprinkled with spices, and families come out in full force, kids flying kites or playing an impromptu game of cricket. In time for sunset, we'd head back to the colonial-style Verandah of the Galle Face Hotel for cold hops and our own short eats under lazy ceiling fans as the sun made its exit in dramatic hues of orange and pink. Earlier that night on December 31, we'd dined at the Gallery Café at Paradise Road, housed in a gorgeous building designed by Sri Lanka's most prolific architect, Geoffrey Bawa.



From left: Taking a break by a typical house front in the Gion district of Kyoto, Japan; front-row views of the Colombo sunset from the historic, oceanside Galle Face Hotel

Though I spent a chunk of my childhood less than two hours by plane from Sri Lanka, this trip three years ago was my first – perhaps unsurprising given the conflict that roiled the country for over two decades. I have no comparison for the city pre- and post-war, but author Shehan Karunatilaka – whose novel *Chinaman* should be required reading for those planning to visit – does. In this issue, he casts a fresh eye over his hometown and finds plenty worth travelling there for (*Colombo calling*, p 20).

Novelist and travel writer Pico Iyer also goes in search of new experiences, in Japan, the country he's called home since the early Nineties, and finds a special place – far removed from neon Tokyo – in the unspoiled, snowy western region of the country, where time might well have stood still (*Heart of lightness*, p 96).

The great thing about Asia is that you can hop on a short flight from one country to the next, yet have a vastly different experience in each place. You can ski, loll on the beach, dive virgin coral reefs, hike mountains, track wildlife in the jungle, delve into history, buy art, shop international luxury brands, eat Michelin-starred fare or sample amazing street food for less than a dollar. With so much going on, it seemed only fair to dedicate this issue to travelling through this multifaceted continent. Perhaps the one constant is that signature Asian service you find everywhere. That alone is worth booking a trip for.

RHEA SARAN Editor in Chief

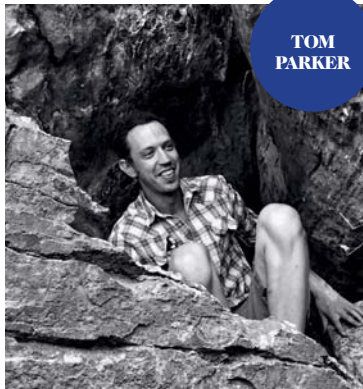
@rheasaran @really_thea



From top: Handwoven fabrics in colourful, geometric patterns at the home-grown Barefoot shop in Colombo; *pol sambol* made from coconut at Ministry of Crab

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**TOM
PARKER**

A contributing photographer to the various global editions of *Condé Nast Traveller*, *Departures* and *Architectural Digest*, Parker enjoys travelling to places that other people can't easily get to. This year, he's already ticked off the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad and north-western Australia.

BASED IN: Brixton, London

PHOTOGRAPHED: *Colombo calling*, p 20

MY FAVOURITE PART OF SHOOTING IN COLOMBO WAS...

"Hanging out at Barefoot Café, listening to a live jazz band and meeting Colombo's bohemian arty crowd, before heading to Ministry of Crab and gorging on fresh Sri Lankan crab and lobster in the renovated Old Dutch Hospital building. The city is a completely different place compared to when I lived in Sri Lanka over a decade ago."

WHERE IN ASIA WOULD YOU LIKE TO VISIT NEXT?

"North and South Korea. North Korea is very slowly opening up and you can now reach places that were previously outside the relatively well-trodden tourist circuit. South Korea is the complete opposite and I'd love to visit both of them back-to-back for a unique experience."



**PRIYANKA
PRADHAN**

Freelance journalist Pradhan is a former TV reporter and producer from Mumbai with a passion for solo travel. She splits her time between language classes and indulging her foodie side.

BASED IN: Dubai

WROTE: *History on a plate*, p 40

SAMPLING THE PHILIPPINES' CUISINE WAS INTERESTING BECAUSE...

"I tried becoming vegetarian three months before my trip to the Philippines, but within hours of landing in Manila I had tried everything from partially developed duck embryo (*balut*) to dishes made from bovine family jewels. Blame it on curiosity or the spirit of adventure but it's safe to assume I'm never going back to the vegetarian side again."

WHERE IN ASIA WOULD YOU LIKE TO VISIT NEXT?

"I'd love to do a road trip across the Seven Sister States in north-eastern India – Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura. There's much to explore in this region in terms of culture, youth identity and political history that collectively shaped the states in post-independence India and made them so distinctive from the rest of the country."



**SHEHAN
KARUNATILAKA**

In addition to writing features for the likes of *GQ*, *Rolling Stone* and *The Guardian* and adverts for clients such as Adidas, Emirates and Mercedes-Benz, Karunatilaka has penned lyrics to songs as well as a novel called *Chinaman*, which won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize and the DSC Prize in 2012. He is currently busy with his second novel and his first child.

BASED IN: Colombo and Singapore

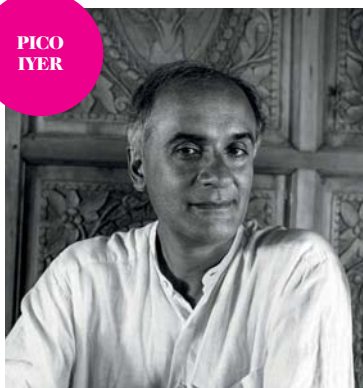
WROTE: *Colombo calling*, p 20

THE MOST ENJOYABLE PART OF WRITING ABOUT COLOMBO WAS...

"Most of my research was done around 4pm, the time we take the baby for a stroll. The light is magical at this time and Colombo is wonderful to walk around, when the breeze is up and the sun is down."

WHERE IN ASIA WOULD YOU LIKE TO VISIT NEXT?

"There are many places I'd be delighted to revisit, like Hanoi, Angkor, Rajasthan and Bali. But the two places that intrigue me are ones I've read about my entire life but never visited. As much as I'm versed in the food, cinema, literature, history and quirks of Japan and China, I've never been. I don't think I can say I truly know Asia until I've experienced the Far East."



**PICO
IYER**

The author of 10 works of non-fiction and two novels, Iyer's most recent book, *The Art Of Stillness*, was released last November. He has been writing for *Condé Nast Traveler* in America for more than 27 years, since its fourth issue, in January 1988.

BASED IN: Nara, Japan and Santa Barbara, California

WROTE: *Heart of lightness*, p 96

I WANTED TO WRITE ABOUT RURAL JAPAN BECAUSE...

"Despite 27 years in Japan, I'd seldom seen anywhere as quiet and untouched as the villages I describe in this piece; I felt as if I'd been dropped into the 16th century, and a calmer, much more unaffected Japan. In Takayama I found a compact, shining vision of my beloved Kyoto, but in much more tranquil and manageable a form."

WHERE IN ASIA WOULD YOU LIKE TO VISIT NEXT?

"I'm on my way to Mongolia, and recently enjoyed the trip of a lifetime in Iran (as well as a return trip to North Korea). The places I'd most like to see are parts of my ancestral homeland, India, that I've never got to see, from Goa to Kerala."

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HAPPY DAYS

COLOMBO CALLING

With a buzzing restaurant scene and a cultural resurgence, the Sri Lankan city is on the up, says SHEHAN KARUNATILAKA

Photographed by TOM PARKER

I've lived in Colombo on and off for more than 30 years and never felt the need to take a tour of it. That changed the day Bollywood disappeared. Whenever I've been asked to name my favourite place in Colombo, I had my answer. Not Galle Face Green or Mount Lavinia beach but Bollywood. For years, this dingy DVD shop in Kollupitiya served as my solace, my education and my weekly outing. While there were DVD sellers in most Colombo malls, their box sets and box-office hits couldn't touch Bollywood's offerings of Hitchcock, Fellini, Kurosawa, Bergman, Kubrick and other cinema legends for less than LKR200 (AED 5) a pop. It was a treasure trove stuffed into a shanty. ▶



Locals and tourists enjoying the fresh air from the pier. **Opposite:** Sea Spray Restaurant at the Galle Face Hotel

Agenda

CALENDAR ■ ETHAN HAWKE ■ BORNEO FOR KIDS



The Gallery Café
combines art and
gastronomy



Barbara Sansoni,
who runs the
Barefoot Gallery

FOR MANY YEARS, MY TOURS OF COLOMBO WERE LIMITED to the second-hand bookstalls of Maradana, the local swimming pool, a few dodgy bars and a DVD store the size of a large elevator. The city of my childhood had been plagued with curfews, riots and bombs. I had little interest in, or affection for, it. And then, Bollywood vanished. Downloads were killing DVD sales and my favourite Colombo hangout was the latest casualty. The rambutan seller next door reckoned it had moved to Pettah, somewhere amid the sweaty side streets, crumbling buildings and heaving bazaars. I made repeated visits but couldn't find it. Then I began to think, not as fondly, of other things that had vanished from Colombo. The slums and rubbish dumps that marked us as another unkempt Asian capital evaporated a few months before we hosted the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in 2012. After the civil war, even the checkpoints were dismantled and the walls taken down. Buildings rose where shanty towns once crowded together. Roads were carpeted, streets lit up.

Take Pettah, for instance, a sprawl of pavement vendors peddling imported wares and used goods at half price. A carnival of chaos, where antiques lurk amongst kitsch and colour competes with noise. What was the turf of traders and gangsters has lost ground to developers and hipsters.

Recently opened on a canal linking Pettah to Beira Lake, The Floating Market, a wooden walkway of shops and restaurants, is part of the new Colombo brought to you by the Urban Development Authority, run by the Ministry of Defence. The money and muscle that won the war is now being used to make the city prettier and

Juices and cookies at
The Gallery Café





Colombo Courtyard, a cosy boutique hotel



The red Cargills building in the business district dates back to the 1800s

The money and muscle that won the war is now being used to make Colombo prettier. Parks that were previously avoided at night are now floodlit, landscaped and paved

easier to digest. And it seems to be working.

The Floating Market follows Arcade Independence Square (Bollywood actress Jacqueline Fernandez has a restaurant here called Kaema Sutra), the Colombo Racecourse and the Dutch Hospital Shopping Precinct – all colonial buildings that have been renovated to house shops, restaurants, cafés and green spaces. Parks like Viharamahadevi, previously avoided at night, are now floodlit, landscaped and paved. Pettah Interchange, an annual electronic music event as vibrant as the festival of Esala Perahera, as noisy as the night car races along the city centre and as colourful as the art biennale, is further proof that the city is reinventing itself. Abandoned marketplaces and terraces become venues for electronic dance parties with DJs from all over the world. And while local cinema and literature are still finding their voice, the local theatre scene is assured and provocative, with political satires, bawdy comedies and immersive drama experiments, all performed to packed audiences.

The capital is slowly developing a culture of its own. I think of this as I plod from Fort, the city's central business district, past the Cargills building, which dates back to the 1800s, into the breeze of Galle Face Green before resting in the shade of the Old Dutch

Hospital. It is the kind of walk that 4pm was invented for. Watching the honey light play with the trees and tops of buildings, I slowly grow ashamed for choosing a DVD shop as my favourite city attraction.

And that's when I spy the red double-decker, the vehicle for an open-top tour, going, at pushbike pace, around Cinnamon Gardens' preserved buildings (it's the correct speed at which to view them). I sign up for a trip with Colombo City Tour. Later, I track down a company called Trekurious, which, among other tours, runs a Dodgy Bar Tour around Pettah and Fort.

As I chat with friends, I find out that those who didn't grow up here appreciate the city more than I do. And that everyone has their own version of the "City Tour". Dripping with history, not all of it pretty, and ambling toward an uncertain future, somewhere between a messy Singapore and a neat India, Colombo is a place where you can make up your own tours to experience the city. I, too, have made up a few.

The Tick Box Tour is perfect for those who buy greatest hits albums. It can be completed in a day or savoured in two. Lunch at the popular Barefoot Garden Café, amid books and bohemians. A walk along Independence▶



An egg hopper being prepared at an eatery in Fort



Al fresco dining at Barefoot Garden Café. **Left:** The Barefoot shop

Square, where the rich and the pear-shaped come to shed pounds and share gossip. Sunset at Galle Face Green, sipping tea by the sea, watching children attached to kites. Dinner at Tintagel Colombo, a former home of three Prime Ministers, and now a hotel fit for a king (or at least a prince named Charles). You could also climb Galle Buck Lighthouse, chill at Mount Lavinia beach, shop at House of Fashions and toast the horizon from the Sky Lounge at The Kingsbury.

But as any Pink Floyd fan knows, greatest hits tell you none of the real story. If you'd like to watch Colombo's best moments performed live, there are several options, such as the Architecture Tour. Lanka's most celebrated architect, Geoffrey Bawa, designed the parliament on the lake, The Gallery Café couched in trees and the Seema Malaka Temple on Beira Lake. Drive from Fort to Cinnamon Gardens via Slave Island and you'll see the past in the Colombo National Museum and Grand Oriental Hotel; the opulence of Nelum Pokuna Mahinda Rajapaksa Theatre and the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall, two of many gifts from the Chinese. And a town hall that looks like the White House opposite a mosque that looks like the Kremlin.

There's the Cemetery Tour of Borella Kanatte, where pop stars from the Sixties, soldiers from the 17th century and Sir

Try the Food Tour – chilli crab at Ministry of Crab, egg hoppers at Green Cabin and organic produce at the Good Market every Saturday

Arthur C Clarke lie below elaborate gravestones and ornate trees.

If that's too morbid, you could try the Food Tour – deep-fried prawns on a savoury *isso wade* at Galle Face Hotel, a *kottu roti* from Hotel De Pilawoos, chilli crab at Ministry of Crab, egg hoppers at Green Cabin and the organic produce at the Good Market every Saturday.

Not everyone has a passionate affair with the city they live in. Maybe one's relationship with one's city is a marriage arranged at birth and, like all marriages, should be judged not by longevity, but by moments shared and memories cherished.

In the end, I never did find Bollywood, though it matters little. I'm watching fewer movies these days. Why sit at home when there are things to explore? I have an Art Tour, a Nightclub Tour and a Museum Tour to take. And a few hundred others I'm yet to make up. **CNT**

A prawn dish at Ministry of Crab



NEED TO KNOW: COLOMBO

WHERE TO STAY

TINTAGEL COLOMBO

Once home to the Bandaranaike family, the mansion houses a 10-suite hotel. Some suites come with private courtyards and balconies. Doubles from AED 830; 0094-11-460 2121, paradiseroadhotels.com/tintagel

GALLE FACE HOTEL

This 81-room, colonial-style hotel has undergone a major renovation. Doubles from AED 495; 0094-11-254 1010, gallefacehotel.com

COLOMBO COURTYARD

This carbon-neutral boutique hotel features sculptures made of scrap metal. Doubles from AED 575; 0094-11-464 5333, colombocourtyard.com

GRAND ORIENTAL HOTEL

The 82 rooms and suites offer free Wi-Fi. Doubles from AED 330; 0094-11-232 0320, grandoriental.com

THE KINGSBURY

There are ocean views from all the rooms. Doubles from AED 495; 0094-11-242 1221, thekingsburyhotel.com

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

MINISTRY OF CRAB

Enjoy the crustacean in a variety of delicious ways at this stellar restaurant.

From AED 30; 0094-11-234 2722, ministryofcrab.com

BAREFOOT

This café (and bookshop, gallery and clothing store), with a live jazz band, is the place to be on a Sunday afternoon. From AED 15; 0094-11-258 9305, barefootceylon.com

KAEMA SUTRA

The restaurant serves Sri Lankan fare such as curries and hoppers. From AED 20; 0094-11-267 0722, kaemasutra.com

MILK AND HONEY CAFÉ

This little spot has some great smoothies and vegetarian wraps. From AED 19; 0094-11-523 4373

RNR RESTAURANT

Head here for some good Chinese at the Colombo Racecourse. From AED 15; 0094-11-269 1155, rnr.lk

GREEN CABIN

Their vegetarian and non-vegetarian lunch buffets are extremely popular with locals. From AED 5; 0094-11-258 8811

HOTEL DE PILAWOOS

This Galle Road branch of the Pilawoos chain is great for post-party munchies. From AED 5; 0094-77-741 7417

SKY LOUNGE

The views are stunning, the drinks potent and the music hopping. From AED 15; 0094-77-108 7720, thekingsbury.lk

THE GALLERY CAFÉ

This place is known for its desserts. From AED 25; 0094-11-258 2162, paradiseroad.lk/gallery_cafe

WHAT TO DO

BEACHES

Mount Lavinia and Galle Face Green are two lovely stretches of sand and surf close to the city.

VIHARAMAHADEVI PARK

Colombo's oldest park has a mini zoo to keep kids entertained.

COLOMBO NATIONAL MUSEUM

The island's principal museum offers a window into Sri Lanka's medieval past. 0094-11-269 5366, museum.gov.lk

GALLE BUCK LIGHTHOUSE

This lighthouse built in the Fifties is a great spot to watch the sun set.

SEEMA MALAKA TEMPLE

It melds South and Southeast Asian architectural styles. 0094-11-243 5169, gangaramaya.com

NELUM POKUNA MAHINDA RAJAPAKSA THEATRE

Musical and theatrical shows are hosted here.



0094-11-266 9433, lotuspond.lk

TREKURIUS

Unique ways to explore Colombo. 0094-11-779 9778, trekurius.com

COLOMBO CITY TOUR

Discover the city from the open upper deck of a red bus. colombocitytours.com

WHERE TO SHOP

MARADANA

The used-book vendors on DR Wijewardena Mawatha stock a range of books, from Tolstoy to Arthur C Clarke.

ARCADE INDEPENDENCE SQUARE

It houses several shops and restaurants. Look out for local labels like 79 at Aashkii. arcadeindependencesquare.com

DUTCH HOSPITAL SHOPPING PRECINCT

The heritage building has shops, restaurants, cafés and green spaces. Odel, the department store, has moved here. colombodutchhospital.com

HOUSE OF FASHIONS

This shopping mall stocks clothing and home décor. 0094-11-215 4555, houseoffashions.lk

GOOD MARKET

Pick up fresh, organic produce and ready-to-eat meals, as well as art and handicrafts. goodmarket.lk

ESSENTIAL READING & VIEWING

Booker-winner Michael Ondaatje offers a riveting window into the island's society and violent past in *Anil's Ghost*.

The 1984 Harrison Ford-starrer, *Indiana Jones And The Temple Of Doom*, was shot in and around the ancient city of Kandy, 135km from Colombo.

Getting there

Emirates (emirates.com) and Sri Lankan Airlines (srilankan.com) fly direct to Colombo



AROUND THE WORLD WITH... Ethan Hawke

*The actor and writer won praise for movies as diverse as **Reality Bites** and **Training Day**, but it was his role in the **Before Sunrise** trilogy that inspired a whole generation of adventurers*

Where in the world have you felt happiest?

New York City. Greenwich Village in the summertime is heaven. I always wanted to go to New York when I was younger; I thought of it as a mecca for a certain type of artistic personality, so I kind of always longed for it... and nowhere cuts us as deep as those places you long for as a kid. Then there are the ones I've come to love, like Shakespeare and Company bookshop in Paris, which is one of my favourite places on earth. And Austin, Texas, because I was born there.

Name a place that most lived up to the hype.

Lincoln Center Theater in New York. When you perform there, it feels like you're in the bullseye of the universe.

And a place that least lived up to the hype.

The Great Wall of China. I heard you could see it from outer space, and it's very impressive, but it's still just a wall.

What's your favourite city?

Austin. My friendship with (screenwriter and director) Richard Linklater started there, and it's where I've made some of the best movies of my life. It's kind of a magical city because it has all the greatness of Texas without the small-mindedness that can sometimes accompany it. And it's also a rock'n'roll capital. If you're serious about rock'n'roll, you gotta go to Austin.

"I lost my heart in..."

I've lost my heart so many times that it's hard to say. New Jersey, Paris, New York, Vienna, California. The best thing about losing your heart is that it seems to find its way back. I plan on losing it several times more.

What do you pack first?

I have a leather bag of books for when I get bored. I spend half my life in hotel rooms, waiting for planes or backstage waiting to be called to set, so there's always time to read something.



'Austin is where I've made some of the best movies of my life. It's a magical city and it's also a rock'n'roll capital'

Describe your favourite view.

I'm trying to say this in a way that doesn't sound corny, but if I see all four of my kids at one time, that's my favourite view. And I couldn't care where we were.

What's the top place you've been for work?

When I was 18, I filmed *White Fang* in Alaska for six months and it was one of the most incredible experiences I've ever had. I still dream about it.

Describe a childhood holiday memory.

Camping in the Rocky Mountains with my dad, I remember waking at night and



Alaska, where Hawke filmed *White Fang*. **Below:** Austin is his favourite city



watching beavers building a dam. It's probably part of why Richard (Linklater) and I put a father-and-son camping scene in *Boyhood*. I spent the most valuable time with my dad away from the world.

Where did you go on your first holiday without your parents?

London, when I was 16. Then I took the boat to Calais for a month of Interrailing and exploring Europe. I was incredibly anxious to grow up and I

was not doing well at school, and my mother said, "Is there anything I can do that will make you take your school work more seriously?" And I said, "If you let me go to Europe by myself this summer, I'll make the honour roll". So I got to go by myself. I actually saw a very young Kenneth Branagh on stage in London and was wildly inspired.

Tell us about a great little place you know.

Le Grainne Cafe in New York has great coffee. It's my favourite place for breakfast.

What's the smartest hotel you've ever stayed in?

The Hôtel de Crillon in Paris; even the toilets probably cost a million dollars. But I don't really like fancy hotels. I don't feel comfortable if it's too fancy; you feel like if you spill your coffee, you'll be put in jail. The best hotel I ever stayed at in Paris was called the Hôtel Duc de Saint Simon. It's very tucked away and I just loved it. [CNET](#)



JULY

What in the world is happening this month

1-28

WHERE Lucca, Italy

WHAT In the tree-lined Piazza Napoleone in this historic walled city, the **Lucca Summer Festival** (summer-festival.com/home) plays host to international artists including John Legend (July 5), Elton John (July 11) and Lenny Kravitz (July 26).

HOW After a long night of open-air live music, retreat to the private Villa Alibia, set on a picturesque estate with panoramic views over the city from every room. *Villa (sleeps eight) from AED 5,500; 001-514-393 8844, luxuryretreats.com*

1-31

WHERE Kyoto, Japan

WHAT Taking its name from Kyoto's most well-known geisha district, the annual **Gion Matsuri** festival lasts through the month of July. The highlight is the 17th, when a parade of 32 massive floats takes to the streets, showcasing traditional tapestries.

HOW Emirates (emirates.com) and Qatar Airways (qatarairways.com) fly direct from the GCC to Osaka, from where it is

a 90-minute drive to Yasaka Shrine, the starting point of the parade.

14

WHERE Paris, France

WHAT Celebrate French independence on **Bastille Day** by following a parade all the way from the Arc de Triomphe to the Place de la Concorde, then attending a fire station ball (open to all) or heading down to Champs de Mars for a picnic beneath the fireworks.

HOW Not the picnicking type? Watch the fireworks light up the Eiffel Tower while dining on fine French fare from the rooftop Raphael Terrace at Hôtel Raphael. *0033-1-5364 3230, leshotelsbaverez.com*

16-26

WHERE Durban, South Africa

WHAT Hosting over 250 screenings of cutting-edge cinema, with a focus on African films, this year's **Durban International Film Festival** (durbanfilmfest.co.za) will include workshops and seminars by regional and international film-makers as well as forums.

HOW Explore the landscapes and wildlife that have inspired many a movie set in

Africa at the Tala Private Game Reserve, just an hour away, where you can spot rhinos, hippos and giraffes on a guided bush walk.

Guided walks from AED 60 per person; 0027-31-781 8000

29-August 2

WHERE Maine, USA

WHAT Taking over Rockland's Harbor Park each year, the **Maine Lobster Festival** (mainelobsterfestival.com) is five days of fun and feasting. Tuck into the state's famed crustacean while enjoying views of Penobscot Bay, carnival rides and local art.

HOW July is a great time for whale-watching when the humpback whales return to New England. Book a trip with Odyssey and set course to whale-feeding grounds where you can observe the majestic mammals. *AED 180; 001-207-775 0727, odysseywhalewatch.com*

BOOK NOW FOR...

AUGUST 26 La Tomatina, Buñol, Spain
latomatina.org



Children examining a
rafflesia flower on Mount
Kinabalu in Sabah

ADVENTURES IN THE JUNGLE

With its amazing wildlife, enchanting national parks and pristine beaches, Malaysian Borneo is a wonderful place for a family holiday, says CHAITALI PATEL

TAKE YOUR CHILDREN INTO the wilderness can be nerve-racking for any parent, so it was with trepidation that my husband and I set off to Malaysian Borneo with our two-year-old daughter Anika and four-year-old nephew Ved. But we needn't have worried; it turned out to be the family holiday of a lifetime.

Sarawak and Sabah, the two states in this part of Borneo, each offer travellers a unique experience. While the former combines culture and history with city life and adventure, the latter has virgin beaches, fantastic snorkelling spots and a chance to see orangutans and turtles in the wild. Either choice is sure to make the entire family fall in love with Borneo.

SARAWAK

At about 124,000sqkm, Sarawak is a large state, rich in cultural heritage and wildlife. The easiest way to explore it with your kids is to make the capital city of Kuching your base. There are some great hotels for families, such as the **Hilton Kuching** (doubles from AED 230; 0060-822-2 3888, hilton.com). Built on the waterfront of the Sarawak River, this child-friendly hotel is within walking distance of many of the city's key attractions, has a special kids' menu (fish and chips, pizza, spaghetti bolognese, smoothies, milkshakes, ice cream), babysitting services and a swimming pool just for children. There are a number of playgrounds in nearby malls, such as **Plaza Merdeka** (plazamerdeka.com), **The Spring** (thespring.com.my) and **CityONE Megamall** (cityone.com.my). Another good hotel option is **Merdeka Palace Hotel & Suites** (doubles from AED 375; 0060-822-5

8000, merdekapalace.com), which fronts the beautiful grassy square, Padang Merdeka, and has a playground on the eighth floor.

A cruise down the Sarawak River, following in the footsteps of English adventurer Sir James Brooke, who arrived here in late 1838, is a great way to get a feel for Kuching's history. The Sultan of Brunei gave Brooke the title of Rajah of Sarawak for helping quell tribal rebellions; during the time of Brooke's rule, Kuching prospered and became the glorious city it is today. The cruise will take you past magnificent structures from the Brooke dynasty, the Parliament building and traditional Malay fishing villages. It's a chance for parents to relax and for kids to enjoy playing pirates or warriors.

After the river ride, amble along Kuching's beautiful waterfront to discover the city's history at your own pace. The 1km-long, tree-lined esplanade has plaques installed along it, providing information about interesting buildings and events. And the food stalls, playground and boats on the river will keep kids entertained, as will the various museums. At the **Cat Museum** (0060-824-4 6688), they can gawk at about 2,000 feline artefacts.

Kuching actually means cat in Malay, so a stop-off here seems compulsory. When you need a break from culture, head to the quaint,

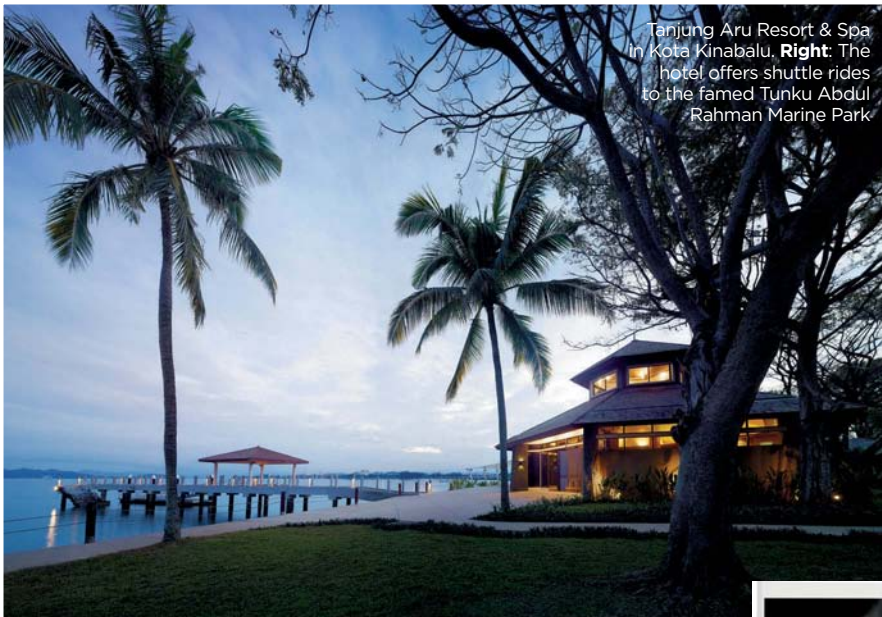
riverside **James Brooke Bistro & Café**. While waiting for your fruit juices and spring rolls, you can browse the magnificent coffee-table books on Borneo or play a game of chess.

Once you've explored all the city's attractions, you don't have to go too far to reach the jungle. Your hotel's travel desk can arrange a trip to **Bako National Park** (bakonationalpark.com), which is 37km from Kuching, on a narrow piece of land jutting out into the South China Sea. It can only be reached by a 45-minute drive to Kampung Bako village, followed by an adventurous 30-minute boat ride. This may seem daunting, but if you can steel your kids (and yourself) for the ride, Bako will reward you the moment you set foot in it, with awe-inspiring rock formations on the beach and forests that reverberate with animal life. A short guided walk around the park headquarters alone can yield sightings of long-nosed proboscis monkeys, wild boar, long-tailed macaques, silvered langurs and water monitor lizards. And for families with older children, there are many longer jungle treks available. Most hotels are happy to pack a picnic lunch for you to enjoy in the park.

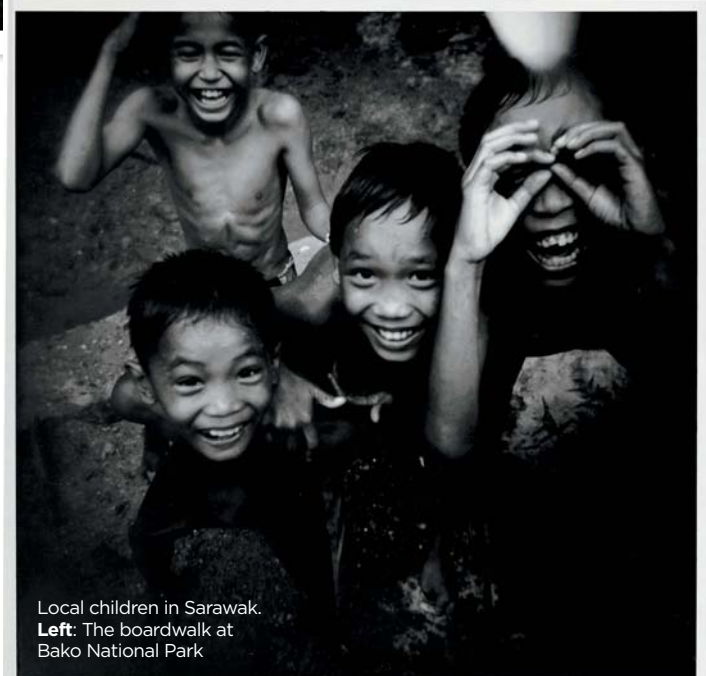
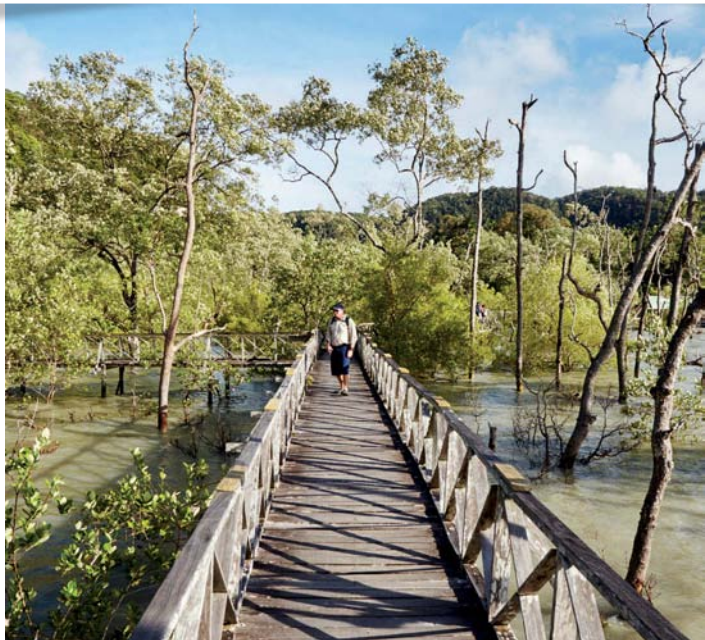
While proboscis monkeys are a big draw at Bako, it's the rafflesia – the world's largest flower – that brings people to **Gunung Gading National Park** (sarawakforestry.com), a two-hour drive from Kuching. To see the plant in bloom is rare as it has no fixed flowering season. While the sheer size of the flower is awe-inspiring, be warned that a rafflesia in full bloom emits a foul odour.

Everyone who goes to Borneo dreams of seeing an orangutan in the rainforest. But without trekking miles through uncharted terrain – not an ideal plan if you've got quarrelsome kids in tow – your chances of ▶

“The nature reserve is home to orangutans, long-tailed macaques, civets, monitor lizards, fruit bats and 63 species of bird”



Tanjung Aru Resort & Spa in Kota Kinabalu. **Right:** The hotel offers shuttle rides to the famed Tunku Abdul Rahman Marine Park



Local children in Sarawak. **Left:** The boardwalk at Bako National Park

seeing one in the wild are almost as slim as that of seeing a flowering rafflesia. Your best bet in Sarawak is the **Semenggoh Wildlife Centre** (sarawakforestry.com), a half-hour drive from Kuching. You'll glimpse these semi-wild, endangered great apes during the feeding sessions, which take place at 9am and 3pm.

An hour's drive north of Kuching will bring you to the **Sarawak Cultural Village** (scv.com.my), where the "living museum" is home to 150 people who demonstrate the handicrafts and cultural heritage of Sarawak's diverse tribes. The kids will love the traditional homes, elaborate costumes and local games. Even better, they can try on the finery, complete with blowpipes and shields. There's also an excellent 45-minute theatre performance daily at 11.30am and 4pm.

Once you've had your fill of history and wildlife, spend some time at a resort on one

of the sandy beaches north of Kuching. **Damai Beach Resort** (*doubles from AED 230; 0060-828-4 6999, damaibeachresort.com*), has two pools each for children and adults, a tennis court, mini-golf, table tennis, beach volleyball and a Kids' Village with tree houses, board games, storybooks and a mini playground. And while the children mess around building sandcastles on the private beach, you can relax at the The Santubong Spa. Another good option is **Damai Puri Resort & Spa** (*doubles from AED 250; 0060-828-4 6900, damaipuriresort.com*), which also has a kids' club, a gorgeous stretch of white sand and two swimming pools.

SABAH

To experience the best of Borneo's coastline – along with some great snorkelling, trekking and wildlife – there is no better place than Sabah, the northern state of Malaysian Borneo.

Its capital city, Kota Kinabalu, makes for an excellent base from which to explore the region. You can't go wrong with the city's two Shangri-La properties. At **Tanjung Aru Resort & Spa** (*doubles from AED 730; 0060-883-2 7888, shangri-la.com*), it'll be difficult to get the children out of the 2,000sqm pool, with its play area featuring huge water slides and battle stations with water-balloon launchers. The hotel's Kids' Club has professional, English-speaking staff and a babysitting service, so you can book a long, luxurious pampering session for yourself at Chi, The Spa without feeling guilty. The hotel offers an incredibly fun and varied range of activities for kids on an hourly basis, such as card-making, biscuit-baking or a treasure hunt – you'll be forgiven for being tempted to join in. And on Friday nights, from 6pm to 10pm, there's a party for four- to 12-year-olds. Meanwhile, at **Rasa Ria Resort**



The misty rainforest in Sabah. **Left:** An orangutan at the Semenggoh Wildlife Centre in Sarawak

& Spa (doubles from AED 700; 0060-887-97888, shangri-la.com), in addition to most of the above, there's also a 64-acre nature reserve, which is home to orangutans, long-tailed macaques, civets, monitor lizards, fruit bats and 63 species of bird. You can explore the reserve on guided walks, and older children can get involved in conservation efforts by assisting the rangers with their daily tasks.

Both properties have beautiful private beaches, but you can also easily explore nearby islands and bays for some off-the-beaten-track snorkelling. Your hotel can arrange a day trip to the **Mantanani Islands** (mantananiisland.com), an hour's drive and a 45-minute boat ride away from Kota Kinabalu. These three isles have white-sand beaches, crystal-clear water and riotously vibrant marine life, including some lovely coral reefs. You could even set out on a guided two-day adventure trek to the summit of **Mount Kinabalu** (mountkinabalu.com), in Kinabalu National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. At 13,435ft, it's the island's tallest peak (fun fact: it's also the highest point between the Himalayas and New Guinea). With its granite peaks, often veiled in cloud, it's a magical climb and a great family bonding experience.

For more jungle and wildlife adventures, leave Kota Kinabalu behind and catch a 45-minute flight to Sandakan, in eastern Sabah, for a few days at the **Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre** (sabahtourism.com) in the Kabili-Sepilok Forest Reserve. As at the Semenggoh Wildlife Centre, the best time to observe the orangutans is during their feeding

sessions (10am and 3pm daily). Stay at the comfortable, child-friendly **Sepilok Nature Resort** (doubles from AED 265; 0060-896-73999, sepilok.com), within walking distance of the centre. Combine a visit to Sepilok with a few days on **Turtle Island** (turtleislandborneo.com) in the Sulu Sea, just 40km north of Sandakan. Here, you can witness endangered green and hawksbill turtles laying eggs and watch the hatchlings make their way into the ocean, an incredibly heart-warming sight. The island is a magnificent example of wildlife preservation and a trip here is a great way to introduce your children to hands-on conservation efforts.

Taking your family into the wild jungles of Malaysian Borneo may seem like a daring move but it's one worth making; whether you choose Sarawak or Sabah (or both), it's guaranteed to give you memories to last a lifetime and leave all of you yearning for more. Children should grow up listening to tales of the forest and its magnificent creatures, exploring the wonders of the natural world, learning how to respect the varied life forms on Earth – and what better way than a trip into the wilderness to make their childhood fantasies come alive? **CNT**

Getting there

Emirates (emirates.com), Etihad (etihad.com) and Qatar Airways (qatarairways.com) fly direct to Kuala Lumpur from where it's a two-hour flight to Kuching with Malaysia Airlines (malaysiaairlines.com)

BORNEO WITH KIDS TIPS AND TRICKS

- A good insect repellent is a must when visiting any national park.
- Carry toilet paper and antibacterial hand wipes; washrooms tend to be quite basic outside of big hotels.
- Malaysian food is available at canteens and cafés, but if your children are fussy eaters, it's best to carry a packed lunch from your hotel.
- Borneo's weather is unpredictable, with rainfall throughout the year. Raincoats, a spare set of clothes and an extra bag for wet clothes are handy if you get caught in a sudden downpour.
- Pack light, cool clothing that is suitable for the heat and humidity, and neutral colours for the jungle.
- Most national parks aren't stroller-friendly, so if you're travelling with babies and toddlers, carry a sling.

WHEN TO GO

The best time to visit is March–October (though do keep in mind that Borneo gets rain throughout the year).

DON'T MISS

The Borneo Bird Race 2015, a bird-spotting competition, will be held on September 18 and 19. borneobirdfestival.com

Bangkok seen across the
lake at Lumpini Park.
The city is home to
Asia's best restaurant



Word of mouth

TOKYO ■ CAPE TOWN ■ DOHA ■ MORE TRAVEL NEWS

Bangkok

SPICE MASTER

Last month was big for Chef Gaggan Anand: his progressive Indian restaurant, Gaggan, rose to the No 10 spot on the World's 50 Best Restaurants list (it also leads the Asian list). The Bangkok-based restaurateur talks to CNT about his favourite street food and which airline meals he rates

Bangkok



Free-range lamb chops cooked *sous-vide* at Gaggan

IF YOU HAD TO TRAVEL JUST TO EAT, WHERE WOULD YOU GO?

San Sebastián in Spain's Basque Country. There are amazing restaurants there – Arzak, Mugaritz, Martín Berasategui, Zuberoa, Akelarre. They've all featured on various lists of the world's top restaurants.

GIVEN THAT YOU TRAVEL SO MUCH, WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF AIRLINE MEALS?

Jet Airways and Singapore Airlines provide good food. I enjoy the food on AirAsia even more because I can choose the dish I want. I believe the future of airline food has to go beyond lobster and caviar and French butter and perfect croissants. Airlines should stop making customers choose between three kinds of meals. Instead, they should give the customer a set of dishes to pick from. It's easier for the airline to stock up exactly what's needed. You know what I eat most often on a flight? I exchange my Business Class meal for the flight attendant's instant noodle pack. They taste excellent on flights.

'On a flight, I often exchange my Business Class meal for the attendant's instant noodle pack'

comes to us fresh, live, from Canada. Also, I won't use any endangered species in my cooking. No Chilean sea bass, no tuna – and no salmon, because salmon is over-farmed. I don't like using farm-raised creatures, only those caught in the wild. My spices are from India. On a trip, I'll be carrying back five kilograms of curry leaves.

DO YOU CRAVE CERTAIN KINDS OF FOOD?

Oh yes. I have these lunch cravings and if I don't get to eat what I want, I go berserk. It could be a bowl of ramen, sushi or Thai papaya salad. Sometimes I crave my mom's food and getting to eat it is blissful.

WHERE HAVE YOU HAD THE BEST STREET FOOD?

In India. I've always thought Kolkata's street food reigns over other cities', but Amritsar in Punjab was a revelation. Every lane around Harmandir Sahib had some secret: there was a *phirni wala* in one, a *kulfi wala* in another, *gulab jamun wala* in a third. I loved the *puri chana* at Munim di Hatti and tandoori chicken at Surjit Food Plaza [both on Lawrence Road], fried fish at Makhan Fish and Chicken Corner on Majitha Road and the mango shake with pistachio ice cream at Kutra Jaimal Singh, near Regent Cinema. In Lucknow, everyone eats kebabs at Tunday Kababi in Aminabad, but I thought the biryani was much better. In the same area is Prakash Kulfi, where the sugar-free *kulfi* is really good. In Mumbai, I love eating *vada pav*, *dhokla* and *khandvi*. I go to Swati Snacks, the Irani cafés and Britannia in Ballard Estate. Trishna in Fort and Gajalee in Vile Parle are also fantastic.

HOW DO YOU DEFINE YOUR STYLE OF INDIAN CUISINE?

The idea of doing progressive Indian food came to me from the music I listen to, which is progressive rock like Pink Floyd. To me, progressive means doing something that has not been done before but has its roots in a specific place. My roots are in India; it's the cuisine I know best. And we have so many different types of cooking in our country that when we talk about Indian food, we can't say it's a single cuisine. Given this variety, it was easy for me to create what I do. I can seduce the guest by creating dishes based on my fantasies, of how I reimagine a *kheema pav* or *bheja fry* or *dhokla*, even.

WHAT'S YOUR PHILOSOPHY ON THE INGREDIENTS THAT GO INTO YOUR DISHES?

The produce has to be absolutely fresh. We deliberately created a tiny storage area in our restaurant kitchen just so that we cannot freeze and stock ingredients. If we need foie gras, we import it fresh from Spain; lobster



Chef Gaggan Anand. Above: Preparing a dish



The restaurant's white, colonial interiors

WORDS: PRASAD RAMAMURTHY; PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES, VASCO CELIO, SANJITH KORAVIVOTIN, ALAMY

GOING LOCAL

Home-grown Chinese hotel brands are stepping into the spotlight and carving their own niche

Hong Kong has long been a base for upmarket Asian hospitality brands (think Mandarin Oriental, Peninsula Hotels and Shangri-La Hotels & Resorts) and now mainland China is stepping it up with a selection of home-grown hotels set to rival many international chains. Last month, five-star hotel group **Nuo** (*nuohotel.com*), a joint venture between Beijing Tourism Group and Kempinski, launched its flagship property in Beijing next door to the city's 798 Art District. Celebrating its Chinese heritage, Nuo has plans for expansion across the country and in global destinations like Paris and London. After introducing the MetroPolo boutique hotel brand in 2014, **Jin Jiang** (*hotels.jinjiang.com*) will launch its J Hotel brand on the upper floors of the Shanghai Tower this year. Jin Jiang and the more mid-range chain **Home Inns Group** (*english.homeinns.com*) are both expanding into Southeast Asia, while **Wanda Group** (*www.wanda-group.com*) is rolling out its Wanda Hotels and Resorts line globally from London and Madrid to Chicago and Australia's Gold Coast.



A Deluxe Room at the new Nuo Hotel Beijing



Tokyo

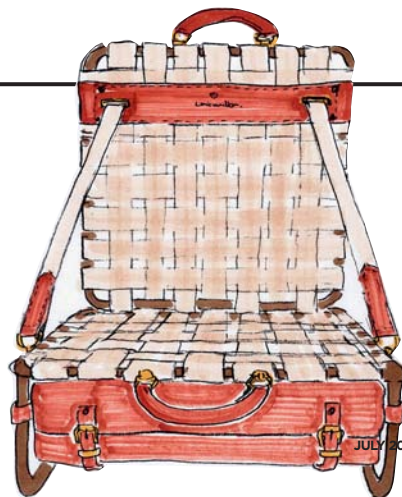
Quirky concept store Niko And in Tokyo's Harajuku neighbourhood

POP-UP SHOP

It's not just shopping that the Japanese take seriously: it's the entire concept of retailing itself. Now, the country that brought you the lifestyle megastore (Muji, whose outposts in Japan sell everything from clothes to sweets to appliances) and the 19-hour bookshop (Tokyo's Daikanyama T-Site) is debuting what might be called the permanent pop-up boutique. Located on a busy thoroughfare on the edge of the youth culture-obsessed Harajuku neighbourhood, Niko And (0081-3-5778 3304, *nikoand.jp/hongkong*) is the flagship of the eponymous fashion label, which specialises in preppy-casual men's and women's separates (think a slightly more normcore version of A.P.C.). But what distinguishes this shop is its commitment to change; the first theme of the store was the city of Portland (a Tokyo obsession), meaning that, along with the brand's perennial offerings of tote bags, music, plants, books, vintage-inspired wrapping paper and magazines, there were candles, limited-batch soaps and coffee sourced from or inspired by Portland, as well as a sun-drenched second-floor restaurant, set up as an outpost of Portland favourite Navarre and serving salads and charcuterie. The selections available in-store and in-restaurant will change frequently, making Niko And a real-time experiment in constant reinvention.

TAKE A SEAT

Look chic by the shore with this portable, foldable beach chair from Louis Vuitton's Objets Nomades Collection. Created in collaboration with Dutch furniture designer Maarten Baas, the limited-edition travel accessory transforms from an attaché case to a chair. It's art you can use.



AED 71,000 by special order, Louis Vuitton



TOKYO MODERNE

Designer Tomas Maier's mission to save the iconic 1962 Hotel Okura – and Japan's modern architecture

Stepping into the Hotel Okura Tokyo (*doubles from AED 640; 0081-3-3582 0111, www.hotelokura.co.jp/tokyo*) is like being teleported to Sixties Japan: There's the retro lobby, a bento box of wood panelling, hexagonal hanging lanterns and chairs clustered around lacquer tables in configurations meant to resemble plum blossoms; the exterior, embellished with tiles in patterns of *namako* (sea cucumbers); the old-school bar where James Bond knocked back drinks in *You Only Live Twice*. For Tomas Maier, creative director of the Italian fashion house Bottega Veneta (and the son of an architect), it was love at first sight.

"The first time I visited Japan was in the mid-Eighties, and I stayed at the Okura," he recalls. "I was taken by the beauty of the lobby, the staff in their kimonos, the hospitality and the details. The Okura was the beginning of my interest in Japanese modernism."

So when it was reported last year that the hotel – designed by architect Yoshiro Taniguchi and a potent symbol of Japan's post-war



Clockwise from far left: Maier, on the Hotel Okura's geometrically tiled staircase; the hotel was built half a century ago; the embellished façade



revitalisation – would be redeveloped for the 2020 Olympics, Maier knew he had to make a pilgrimage before it was too late. He spent several days at the Okura and visited a handful of other modern classics as well, including the Nissay Theatre (*0081-3-3503 3111, nissaytheatre.or.jp*), with its ceiling of 20,000 pearl oyster shells, the Yoyogi National Gymnasium (*0081-3-3468 1171*) and Kenzō Tange's 1964 Kagawa Prefectural Gymnasium. Like these, many of the city's mid-century masterpieces are at risk of demolition, earthquake damage or renovation – and Maier wants them to get the protection they deserve. "Temples and castles in places like Kyoto are recognised as national treasures, and the Japanese put great care into their preservation," he says. "But those built after the war are taken for granted." Now, Bottega Veneta has launched a campaign, spearheaded by Maier, to raise awareness about saving Japan's modern architecture, and to convince its residents that not all of their treasures predate the war. "It's about the possibilities that exist in taking them forward," he says.

A colourful garden salad from the book



Cooking With Light, AED 465; chivasomproducts.com

KEEP IT LIGHT

Celebrating 20 years of wellness and healthy living, Thailand's storied destination spa Chiva-Som is releasing *Cooking With Light*, a book in which the resort's good-food whiz Paisarn Cheewinsiriwat teaches home chefs how to make delicious food that's low on fat, salt and sugar. Think of the healthful Euro-Thai recipes as an extension of your last spa break.

Plan now

6 ESCAPES FROM CAPE TOWN

These driving getaways showcase South Africa's finest landscapes, says **JASREEN MAYAL KHANNA**

1 SCENIC LANDSCAPES: The drive through Cape Peninsula will tick off bucket list experiences for many. Enjoy incredible ocean views as you wind past the dramatic cliffs of Chapman's Peak, and stop by the Boulders Beach penguin colony to see (and pose with) African jackass penguins. End your drive at the craggy landscape of the Cape of Good Hope, the southernmost tip of Africa.

GETTING THERE: 30 minutes

WHERE TO EAT: For fine dining in a casual environment, go to The Foodbarn Restaurant (*entrées from AED 30; 0027-217-89 1390, thefoodbarn.co.za*).

2 VINE N DINE: Famous for their excellent grape, the Cape Winelands are also home to some of Africa's finest speciality restaurants and art collections.

GETTING THERE: 1 hour 50 minutes

WHERE TO STAY: The Delaire Graff Estate (*doubles from AED 2,965; 0027-218-85 8160, delaire.co.za*) in Stellenbosch, owned by Graff Diamonds International, has a stellar art collection along with some legendary jewels on display. And Le Quartier Français (*doubles from AED 1,300; 0027-218-76 2151, lqf.co.za*) in Franschhoek is home to The Tasting Room (*entrées from AED 255*), one of Africa's most renowned restaurants.

4

WEST COAST NATIONAL PARK

2

CAPE WINELANDS

1

CAPE TOWN

3

HERMANUS

GONDWANA GAME RESERVE

5

PLETTENBERG BAY

6

3 ADVENTURE: Spot the Marine Big Five in the coastal town of Hermanus. You can cage dive with great white sharks, watch whales from land, air or sea, swim with dolphins and go island-hopping among playful seals and penguins.

GETTING THERE: 1 hour

WHERE TO STAY: Grootbos Private Nature Reserve (*doubles from AED 1,590; 0027-283-84 8053, grootbos.com*) has exquisite accommodation, cuisine and scenery; Birkenhead House (*doubles from AED 750; 0027-216-71 5502, birkenheadhouse.com*) has a fantastic clifftop location – you can spot whales from your room.

4 WEST COAST DRIVE: The West Coast National Park's Postberg Flower Reserve bursts into bloom from August to September. The rest of the year, drive further north to Paternoster, a local fishing village that is developing a serious culinary scene.

GETTING THERE: 1 hour 10 minutes

WHERE TO EAT: Paternoster's Oep ve Koep (*three-course set menu from AED 90; 0027-227-52 2033*) is a garden restaurant, while The Noisy Oyster (*0027-227-52 2196*) has outstanding seafood.

5 SAFARI: If you're travelling with kids, Gondwana Game Reserve (*0027-446-97 7077, gondwanagr.co.za*) is an excellent safari option. Through its Junior Rangers programme, children are taught how to identify a variety of mammals and birds. Plus, they get a Ranger's backpack and a safari booklet.

GETTING THERE:

5 hours 25 minutes

WHERE TO STAY: Rent a sprawling Bush Villa at Gondwana Game Reserve (*doubles from AED 1,100*).

6 CLASSIC DRIVE: One of the world's most scenic drives, South Africa's Garden Route stretches 204km, from Mossel Bay to the Storms River. Stop at Plettenberg Bay for its golden beaches and Knysna for local art and design.

GETTING THERE:

4 hours to Mossel Bay
WHERE TO STAY: The Conrad Pezula in Knysna (*doubles from AED 985; 0027-443-02 3333, conradhotels3.hilton.com*), located near the Pezula Championship Golf Course, is a golfer's dream. Choose from suites, villas and beach castles.

CNT TIP: To drive in South Africa, you need a valid licence in English that has your photograph and signature. Some car rental companies require an international driving permit



HOT PROPERTY

Designs on Doha

The Qatari capital's skyline is getting a makeover ahead of 2022 with these futuristic hotels



KATARA TOWERS, LUSAIL MARINA DISTRICT

SCHEDULED TO OPEN: 2017

This striking structure by architectural firm Kling Consult is inspired by the crossed swords of Qatar's seal with twin arched towers set to house two luxury hotels as well as serviced apartments. The resort in Doha's waterfront Lusail Marina District will also include two levels of shopping with specialist boutiques and luxury stores, a 31,000sqm cinema, signature restaurants and a private cigar lounge as well as banqueting and conference spaces. Also in the works is a man-made island linked to the property by bridges, where visitors can go to enjoy the beach, water sports, a water park and a choice of dining spots.

katarahospitality.com



SOLIS DOHA

SCHEDULED TO OPEN: 2015

Next to the Qatar National Convention Center, this contemporary building was designed by Hill Glazier Studio (HGS) to be sustainable and offer plenty of shaded areas to escape the heat. The jagged-edged hotel will house meeting spaces, a luxurious spa, three restaurants and 418 rooms and suites, and will be headed by veteran hotelier Horst Schulze (former president, COO and founding member of The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company). The first Solis Hotels & Resorts property in the region will also adopt that very Middle Eastern feature of a private entrance and elevator for penthouse and royal suite guests as well as 1,500m of upscale retail shopping space.

solishotels.com



THE SILVER PEARL HOTEL

SCHEDULED TO OPEN: AHEAD OF 2022

Although an opening date is yet to be confirmed, the design of this hotel – reportedly being handled by New York-based firm M. Castedo Architects – lives up to the name: the stainless steel and glass exterior of two 30-storey, half-moon-shaped buildings will be illuminated at night with LEDs to create an illusion of a shimmering pearl reflecting in the sea. A mile off the coast of Doha, it will be connected by a four-lane causeway and raised off the ocean bed, supported by piers, so the currents aren't impeded. Each room will look out to sea and though the exterior might look space-age, inside there will be elements of Arabic style. Watch this space.

katarahospitality.com

HEART AND SOLE

Shop for a cause with these handcrafted, Arabian-inspired Shamak Sandals, a modern take on the traditional *madras* shoes. For each pair sold, the company, based in Austin, Texas, helps

send a child to school in impoverished areas of South Asia. "We've always wanted to create a rewarding experience for both the customer and the artisans who make our sandals in Pakistan," says founder Farhana Hassanali-Hashmani. "Proceeds from each sale go toward The Citizens Foundation (TCF), which has over 1,000 schools and educates 145,000 underprivileged children each year. We'd love to eventually build a school in the villages of Pakistan – that has been the goal since day one." The hand-stitched sandals are made with fine leathers sourced from around the world and contour to the shape of your foot over time for comfort on the go.



From AED 240, Shamak Sandals at namshi.com



Explore Greenland
via land or sea

ADVENTURES IN GREENLAND

After camping out with penguins in Antarctica, gazing up at the Northern Lights in Lapland and bouncing over frozen lava fields in Iceland, what's the next cold-weather kick? Fix your icy stare across the Arctic Circle on Greenland. The world's largest island, most of it is covered by the only ice sheet outside Antarctica, with just a smattering of primary-coloured clapboard villages along rugged hillsides. Here, though, it's not just hiking to ice caps and helicopter trips over calving glaciers (which "give birth" to giant icebergs). At **Hotel Arctic** in Ilulissat (*doubles from AED 1,113; 00299-94 4153, www.hotel-arctic.gl*), Greenland's top chef, Jeppe Ejvind Nielsen, is experimenting with Arctic cuisine, combining foraged angelica

(a wild herb), crowberries and seaweed with reindeer, musk ox and straight-from-the-line halibut. Smart expedition ships from **Ponant Cruises** (*en.ponant.com*) and **Silversea** (*silversea.com*) explore Greenland's quiet coastline while **North Sailing** (*northsailing.is*) takes passengers on wooden sailing boats up close along the edge of the frozen Arctic in search of polar bears and beluga whales. This summer, new eco-camps are popping up: Natural Habitat will open **Base Camp Greenland** (*nathab.com*) in the remote and little-explored east, and the spectacular **Glacier Lodge Egi** (*cottage from AED 1,900; 00299-94 4300, glacierlodgeeji.com*) is refurbishing its rather basic wilderness huts into sustainable, cosy cabins.

Pretty wooden mansions
in this invigorated part
of Istanbul



NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

ARNAVUTKÖY

Other grand old European cities may be stuck in the doldrums, but in Istanbul – one of the world's fastest-growing, most dynamic cities – there's no sign of financial distress: Indeed, it seems like every month brings a freshly invigorated neighbourhood with inventive restaurants, cafés and boutiques. The latest to get a makeover is the seaside district of Arnavutköy, on the European side of the Bosphorus. This former Albanian enclave – known locally for its simple seafood restaurants and pastel-hued wooden mansions that wouldn't look out of place in San Francisco – hasn't exactly been a hot destination, but that's starting to change. Among the newly opened gathering spots that are attracting locals and tourists and bringing a bit more bustle to the sleepy harbour streets: Any (*0090-212-265 0269*), a bistro housed in a two-storey, Ottoman-era wooden home that morphs into a nightclub; and the cosy Vacilando (*0090-212-263 7448, vacilandoistanbul.com*), a tiny upholstery shop turned café where you're likely to see owner Özge Kiris baking fresh fruit tarts and spinach quiches in the open kitchen while you sip a Turkish coffee.


WORD OF MOUTH

EASTERN BLOOMS

Inspired by creative director Sarah Burton's personal collection of antique kimonos, Alexander McQueen's S/S'15 accessories evoke Japan with floral prints in blossom pink and lantern red. Perfect for a trip to the Land of the Rising Sun.



Top, AED 4,600,
Bag, AED 11,550:
both **Alexander
McQueen**



The Masai Mara is home to the traditional Maasai people

Choose KENYA

Enjoy the adventure of
a lifetime at this unique
wilderness destination
in the heart of Africa

Kenya's varied landscape is home to the Big Five – lion, leopard, buffalo, rhinoceros and elephant – and the annual wildebeest migration in the Masai Mara. But Kenya is so much more than game parks: experience the bustle of Nairobi, meet the Maasai who still pursue a traditional way of life, discover the beautiful beaches of the Indian Ocean, explore the plains of the Rift Valley, or chill out on the laid-back island of Lamu. Take on a challenging trek to the summit of Africa's second highest peak, Mount Kenya,

glide in the Kerio Valley, watch herds of wildebeest graze from the skies above on a hot-air balloon ride, or dive in the Indian Ocean, swimming with whales and dolphins and viewing shipwrecks. Honeymooners can enjoy a romantic bush and beach break where the wilderness meets the sea, making for an unforgettable experience. Whatever you're looking for in an African holiday, Kenya offers warm hospitality and an adventure for everyone.

For more information visit magickkenya.com

Get a bird's eye view of
the landscapes and wildlife
from a hot-air balloon



The Big Five, including
leopards, can be spotted
on safari in Kenya



Explore the hot springs
of Lake Bogoria



HISTORY ON A PLATE

On a road trip to the culinary capital of the Philippines, PRIYANKA PRADHAN gets a glimpse into the past as she samples everything from cricket salad to seafood stew and market-fresh mangoes

“ARE YOU GOING TO EAT THAT?” a curious tourist at my table asked, as my cricket (*kamari*) salad arrived in style, dressed in jelly and salted egg, and garnished with hand-rolled cheese.

This, along with river shrimp in guava soup and papaya with sticky rice, made up part of a seven-course, re-invented menu from Pampanga, Central Luzon, a province known as the culinary capital of the Philippines. I was dining at Casa Roces (0063-2-735 5896, casaroces.com), a refurbished Spanish ancestral home-turned-restaurant in an upscale part of Manila, right across from the Malacañan Palace. Run by the Center for Culinary Arts (CCA), Casa Roces attempts to introduce Filipino food to the global palate by tweaking and creatively enhancing traditional recipes.

“Our cuisine is perhaps the most under-appreciated of all Southeast Asian cuisines,” says Chef Sau del Rosario, culinary director of the CCA and a Pampanga native. “And so far, even we’ve believed that our food is so distinct and unique that it won’t appeal to non-Filipinos. But now we’re getting creative to allow the world a peek into our kitchen.”

Inspired by this sentiment, I set out on a road trip from Manila to Pampanga, vowing to eat anything that was put on my plate. My first stop was at the colossal 12,000sqm Araneta Center Farmers’ Market (0063-2-911-3101), for an introduction to local ingredients such as the lemon zest or souring agent *calamansi*, as well as succulent palm heart, bitter melon fruit and arguably the sweetest variety of mango in the world. The market was a melting pot of sights and aromas: different types of eel (*palos*) – a local favourite – on display alongside sting ray and dried fish (*balad*).

A pot of blood soup (*dinuguan*) arrived at my table at the market’s indoor stretch of restaurants. Admittedly squeamish but equally intrigued, I picked *bibingka* (sweetened rice cake served with grated coconut), *papaitan* (goat’s intestines) and a serving of dried fish to wash down with my blood soup – a meal for those unperturbed by questionable breath. The soup was delectable, despite its gory-sounding ingredient: sweet and sour with fresh chillies that gave it a depth of flavour.



Bilo-bilo dessert with grated coconut. **Above:** Manila is a good starting point for a foodie road trip

While blood is not uncommon in other Southeast Asian cuisines (*nam tok* soup in central Thailand or the Taiwanese blood cakes, for example), the Filipino *dinuguan* can be distinguished by its strong vinegary aftertaste.

Forty-one kilometres north of Manila city, I found myself in the quiet, dusty countryside surrounding the historic town of Malolos in the Bulacan province. Jeepneys and cycles trudged along at an unhurried pace and the red-tile roofs of local homes seemed to glisten in the sun. At the end of a winding street, the neoclassical Bautista Mansion beckoned with the promise of war tales, relics from the country’s pre-independence era and a sumptuous lunch.

Built in the 1850s, the Bautista Mansion is now run by historian and antique collector Dez Bautista and is open to the public. A visit to the grand mansion offers a chance to dine in the same room that Philippines’ national hero José Rizal did just before he was arrested for attempting to garner support for his revolution against Spanish colonial rule. In addition to a slice of history, the kitchen serves up an array of curated heirloom recipes, passed down four generations of the Bautistas. A mouth-watering homemade meal of *Sta Veronica*

Birang – a distinctive preparation involving small pieces of fish or meat, diced vegetables and cheese wrapped together, breaded and fried – and a lovely chat with the charming Bautista took care of both curiosity and hunger. “The women of Malolos invented this dish during the revolution,” he told me. “It was accessible, took 20 minutes to make and had very inexpensive ingredients. It’s due to its simplicity that the dish has survived till today.”

A short walk from the Bautista Mansion lies the Casa Real de Malolos, a museum dedicated to the 21 Women of Malolos, who fought for their right to higher education during Spanish rule. Learning to make traditional tea time snacks and intricate cutwork wrappers for confectionery called *borlas de pastillas* offered an insight into the life and times of working-class women in the Philippines during the 1800s.

Pampanga was my final stop on the road. An inland province, it is known for its freshwater delicacies – especially frog, mole cricket and lizard – used in ancient traditional dishes that have survived the test of time. Life in this province is so closely linked with gastronomy that the kitchen is the largest and





Lumpiang ubod, a fresh spring roll made with palm heart



Diners sample a specially curated menu at Bale Dutung



Bautista Mansion serves heirloom recipes

‘Our cuisine is perhaps the most under-appreciated of all Southeast Asian cuisines. But now we’re getting creative to allow the world a peek into our kitchens’



Halo-halo with pandan yema and ube

most important room in the typical Pampanga house. With Spanish, Mexican, Cantonese and Malay influences, Pampanga’s cuisine has a unique set of flavours. Some of the delicacies that originated here include *biringyi* (chicken in saffron rice) and *tidtad itik* (duck stew), born out of the multicultural exchange.

At the culinary museum in Angeles City, Museo Ning Angeles (0063-45-887 4703), Chef Atching Lillian Borromeo explained how some of the region’s most iconic dishes were accidental inventions or born out of necessity: “In the days of colonial rule there was no cement to build houses, so egg white was used as a substitute. As a result, egg yolk was a by-product and given away free at churches. The women of Pampanga began experimenting with yolks in different ways in the kitchen – giving birth to the 250-year-old recipe for egg-yolk biscuits: Panecillos de San Nicolas.”

For my last supper in the culinary capital, I made my way to Bale Dutung (0063-45-888 5163), home of Pampanga’s artist-chef-writer Claude Tayag who, on occasion, opens his home to the public for a sampling of his specially curated menus. While the sea urchin with *mochi* (rice cakes) and *bringhe talangka* (rice

cakes with crab roe) were crowd favourites from his 11-course menu, a surprise lay in the *kare kareng lamang dagat*. “Did you know this dish – seafood cooked in a peanut-based sauce – was inspired by the Indian curry?” he asked the gathered diners. “When the British army occupied Manila and Pampanga, they brought with them 500 Indian sepoys from the East India Company. These soldiers stayed back after the clash between the British and the Spanish and settled down in the Pampanga region, lending their culinary influence to Filipino food, seen in dishes such as *kare kareng lamang dagat* and *biringyi*, the latter of which is inspired by the Indian biryani.”

With a story behind every dish and a history that’s checkered with the spoils of war and cultural exchange, Filipino cuisine has an important legacy to carry forward. A large part of the cuisine could be considered an acquired taste, suited to adventurous foodies and travellers. Yet even for the more tentative taster, a plate of *adobo* or the curiously named, fruity *halo-halo* dessert will do the trick.

And to answer the wide-eyed tourist’s question about my elaborately dressed cricket salad – I didn’t just eat it, I did so with relish. **CNT**

Angeles City is home to a culinary museum



Getting there


Emirates (emirates.com) and Qatar Airways (qatarairways.com) fly direct from the GCC to Manila

HOMESTAYS: YOUR PLACE OR MINE?

*Travellers have been trading front-door keys since time immemorial. But it's never been easier, with new start-ups popping up to offer other people's homes for our holidays, finds **Fiona Kerr***

When Airbnb launched in 2008, it made the homestay scene seem new. It made it seem hip. And as a pioneer in the new sharing economy, it made it youthful – and encouraged us all to travel differently, to “live like a local”. When I had dinner with Brian Chesky, one of Airbnb’s founders, last January in a clock tower above London’s St Pancras Station (rentable on Airbnb, of course), he told the story of how it began. Struggling to pay rent on their San Francisco apartment, Chesky and his flatmate Joe Gebbia put three airbeds in their living room, filled them with some delegates who were in town for a conference and threw in breakfast. With computer whizz Nathan

Blecharczyk, the third founder, they built a website – and airbedandbreakfast.com was born. “Airbnb is the worst idea that ever worked,” Chesky jokes, now that the company is worth AED 37 billion. Today, some 30 million people have travelled with Airbnb, 20 million of those in the last year alone. Its success has spawned numerous hybrids and imitators. In 2009, One Fine Stay began rounding up some of the most exquisite town houses and apartments in New York and London and glossed-up the experience with hotel-like service. Now, others are carving a niche in the market for families (Kid & Coe) and creative-types looking for high-design homes (Behomm). Here’s the inside track. ▶



This contemporary cabin in Iceland is available to rent on Airbnb

Where to stay

HOLIDAY RENTALS ■ ETHAN HAWKE ■ SEOUL





THE BIGGIE AIRBNB

TOP LINE Homestays for the adventurous bargain hunter

WHO RENTS? Everyone. If you haven't stayed with Airbnb yet, your neighbour (that mid-century-modern pad in Palm Springs), your intern (a treehouse in Tulum) or your kids (camping out in spare rooms around Europe) certainly have.

WHOSE HOUSES? All sorts. Airbnb sells its hosts as the real keys to your destination, and some are hands-on and meet-and-greet. Others simply leave the keys with the cleaner or use electronic keypad locks and send an email with local recommendations. Increasingly, holiday rentals, boutique inns and B&Bs (see the Drift in San Jose) are using Airbnb as their booking agent.

WHERE? There are now more than a million rooms/villas/yurts in more than 190 countries. To put that in context, the world's largest hotel group, InterContinental, has just over 700,000 rooms. When it comes to the big cities, Paris leads the way with the most options (40,000), followed by New York (34,000, despite its legal wrangling) and London (23,000), where new legislation is proposed to make Airbnb letting above board.

THE GOOD STUFF Choice: a castle in Spain, an igloo in Austria, a log cabin in LA or a private island in Fiji? Airbnb has it all. And price: for a last-minute New Year's Eve in Paris last year, we rented an entire Haussmann-esque apartment in Montmartre for the same cost as the last affordable hotel room in town.

WHAT'S THE CATCH? Too much choice. In most popular destinations there are thousands of listings, and wading through them can take a couple of days. It's not just the properties that aren't vetted but the people, too, which means horror stories for renters can happen – squatters and wild parties, although rare (Airbnb offers insurance). For guests, late cancellation or varied ideas on what constitutes cleaning are the worst-case scenarios – but that's what the reviews are for.

FAVOURITE FINDS Clockwise from top: Country-house living in Suffolk; Tom Dixon's London water tower; a treehouse made for two in Andalucía.

001-855-424 7262, airbnb.com

THE FLASHIEST PLAYER ONE FINE STAY

TOP LINE Best for the risk-adverse and time-poor

WHO RENTS? High-maintenance travellers who want all the private-house appeal of staying in a home with none of the hassle – each place is run like a micro-hotel with fresh linens, towels, check-in, beds with hospital corners, the works.

WHOSE HOUSES? The well-heeled and well-travelled (houses have to be available for at least six weeks a year). Hidden in the roughly 2,500 stays, there are homes of artists, opera singers and BAFTA winners. But, of course, that's all very discreet – both sides remain anonymous throughout.

WHERE? Currently only in London, New York, Paris and Los Angeles, but plans are afoot to expand in Europe and America – we heard rumours that Barcelona and Miami could be next.

THE GOOD STUFF This has made

homestays slicker and easier: there's a reservations team, a concierge-on-call from the pre-loaded iPhone received on arrival, even The White Company smellies in the bathroom to swipe. Plus, the standards are high, so it's often like staying on the set of a *World Of Interiors* shoot.

WHAT'S THE CATCH? It's not quite as good for nosy parkers: some rooms are sealed off with tamperproof tape, and how much storage space is out of bounds can vary widely, as can no-shoes rules and more. People with AED 17 million mews houses can be predictably precious. And prices are more akin to hotel levels – from AED 850 a night for a smart one-bedder running into thousands for an interior-designed town house.

FAVOURITE FIND This clued-up Shoreditch loft space (right) in a former costume factory, owned by a writer with an eye for design. 0044-20-7167 2524, onefinestay.com



PHOTO: CATALINA PEREZ & MARIA DANIELA QUIROS



THE CREATIVE CLUB BEHOMM

TOP LINE Eye-catching homes to swap rent-free

WHO RENTS? Arty types with connections. This is an invite-only community open to designers and visual artists – although the list of 100 accepted professions includes art teacher and design PR, as well as graffiti artist and fashion editor. If they don't know an existing member, potential Behommers can contact the founders with their CV and pictures of their home to request membership.

WHOSE HOUSES? The same people who rent: this is old-school house-swapping where you have to list your place, too. Aesthetic appeal, rather than size or expense, is the only criteria for homes – so there's everything from houseboats in Amsterdam to Czech castles. The founders are two Barcelona-based graphic designers, Eva Calduch and Agusti Juste, who say, "Behomm is not for those who believe a diamond is more beautiful

than a piece of wood with its grain."

WHERE? There's currently around 1,400 homes in 53 different countries, with plenty of choice beyond the big cities: a fashion designer's colourful villa in Bali, a photographer's palm-thatched pad in Mexico, a painter's art-filled home in Stellenbosch, for example.

THE GOOD STUFF With Behomm's curated collection, it feels as if you're living in one of *The Selby* books. Plus, beyond the annual subscription fee (AED 380 after one-year's free trial), it's free to play swapsies.

WHAT'S THE CATCH? As this works as a straight exchange, the owners of your desired home have to want to stay at your place, and you'll need to coordinate on dates that suit both sides. Plus, there's a 10-20 per cent rejection rate on houses that don't meet Behomm's aesthetic standard – ouch.

FAVOURITE FINDS A mid-century-modern retreat in Upstate New York (*left*); a creative director's loft in Brooklyn; and a Dolomites chalet. behomm.com



THE FAMILY-FRIENDLY FAVOURITE KID&COE

TOP LINE High-spec pads for children and their entourage

WHO RENTS? It was launched in 2013 by Zoie Kingsbery Coe – who lives with her DJ husband and two kids between New York, London and Ibiza – and clients are much like Coe herself: families who haven't scaled back on travelling because they have children. Already there are actors, rock stars and politicians on the books.

WHOSE HOUSES? Plenty of mobile, creative types. Many listings have little owner's bios next to snaps of toothy kids ("We have two beautiful girls and a Jack Russell dog called Bandito" or "I love discovering new cafés, parks and museums with my son Leo") which adds a *mi casa es su casa* vibe.

WHERE? There are more than 500 houses in 135 destinations – from a beach villa in Kerala to a ski chalet in Argentina as well as plenty of stripped-wood-floored, straight-out-of-the-Hay-catalogue apartments in Paris/New York/Amsterdam.

THE GOOD STUFF The by-families-for-families ethos means all places come with trunks of toys, art supplies and DVDs, and recommendations for the best restaurants with kids' menus. Design is what really sets them apart – you might find a child-sized table surrounded by miniature replica Eames chairs, and bunting-festooned nurseries with teepees to hide in.

WHAT'S THE CATCH? In some key destinations the number of properties is light, so book early for school holidays.

FAVOURITE FINDS Amsterdam's Scandi-styled Wouwermanstraat house (*left*) and a quirky Torrent de les Flors apartment in Barcelona.

001-212-905 6065, kidandcoe.com **CNT**



The sumptuous new Cathay Pacific lounge at Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport

Travel WELL

Enjoy up-in-the-air
luxury and on-the-
ground indulgence
with Cathay Pacific

For more than 70 years, Hong Kong's flagship carrier Cathay Pacific has been putting its customers at the heart of the organisation with its "travelling well to live well" philosophy. In tune with this, the airline has launched the "Life Well Travelled" campaign, bringing travellers the ultimate in luxury experiences.

The award-winning Business Class cabin offers a sense of space with long, wide, lie-flat beds allowing passengers to control their degree of privacy. The personal service, the abstract designs, the scent of freshly cut orchids and the original artworks all harmonise to create a warm, residential feel in the cabin.

Designed by London-based design studio Studioilse, Cathay Pacific recently launched three new lounges – at Tokyo Haneda Airport, Manila Ninoy Aquino International Airport and Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport – with an emphasis on understated luxury. The design focuses on the airline's new ethos, which is to create an environment that engages passengers' senses and promotes relaxation

and wellbeing. Cherry-wood walls and limestone are architectural highlights with natural sunlight filtering through the windows during the day and soothing, muted lighting throughout the lounges come nightfall.

Indulge in gastronomical delights at Cathay Pacific's signature restaurant, The Noodle Bar, featured in each of the lounges and offering a selection of Asian noodles, or kick back at The Food Bar where passengers can enjoy a wide selection of salads, pastries and desserts.

With over 140 wide-body aircraft in its fleet, the airline operates two daily flights between Dubai and Hong Kong (Business Class inclusive fares from AED 8,295) with convenient flight times and seamless connections to over 180 destinations in Asia, North America, Australia, Europe and Africa. The easy-to-use new website design is another way in which Cathay Pacific is helping passengers to travel well.

*For more information visit cathaypacific.ae
and lifewelltravelled.cathaypacific.com*

TRAVELLER PROMOTION



The airline has over 140 wide-body aircrafts. **Left:** Business travellers can enjoy spacious, private seats



Asian hospitality is a hallmark of Cathay Pacific

WHERE TO STAY

BED-HOPPING WITH... Mara Hoffman

The New York-based fashion designer on her favourite relaxing retreats



↑ THE OBEROI RAJVILAS, JAIPUR

"This incredible place is so luxe and well designed. Staying here was one of the most lavish, over-the-top hotel experiences I've ever had. Our 'suite' was in a beautiful tent with peacocks wandering in our backyard. We had a gorgeous claw-foot bathtub in a spacious, open bathroom. It was heaven on earth."

Doubles from AED 1,400; 0091-11-2389 0606, oberoihotels.com

➔ HOTEL LES DEUX TOURS, MARRAKECH

"A stunning oasis in the middle of a desert palm area of Marrakech. The aesthetic is authentic: modern and super comfortable yet sticking to Moroccan traditions. The food was delicious, too."

Doubles from AED 580; 00212-524-32 9525, les-deux-tours.com



↓ CANYON RANCH, MASSACHUSETTS

"I go to this health resort with my mom – it's the perfect getaway from the city. It's about eating well, meditating and reconnecting with yourself."

Doubles from AED 8,100 (two-night all-inclusive package); 001-413-637 4100, canyonranch.com/lenox



➔ FILADELPHIA COFFEE RESORT, LA ANTIGUA

"This resort sits on an old coffee plantation – the hotel and the landscape are surreal. You can ride through the grounds on horseback and view volcanoes from every angle. It's a magical place."

Doubles from AED 480; 00502-7728 0800, filadelfiaresort.com



← GOLDENEYE, ORACABESSA BAY

"My husband, Javier, and I spent our honeymoon here, so it holds a special place in our hearts. The service and the private villas are on the next level: We had a bathtub at the foot of our bed with an open terrace. And the shower is built around a banyan tree so you feel like you're showering in nature."

Doubles from AED 2,300; 001-876-622 9007, goldeneye.com



➔ NO THANKS

"I can't skip on bedding – I love a big, cosy down duvet and soft, quality sheets."



“The shower is built around a banyan tree so you feel like you’re showering in nature”

INTERVIEW: JENNY KING; PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES



ST REGIS
BALI



BEYOND EXPECTATION

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SEOUL

Five avant-garde hotels on the banks of the Han River

ONE TO WATCH

The **Four Seasons** is coming to South Korea for the first time this September. The **25-storey, contemporary building** with 317 guest rooms will tower over the heart of Seoul's **central business district**. Leading design houses and designers, such as **LTW Designworks**, **AvroKO** and **André Fu**, are working on the project. fourseasons.com



DESIGN



LEGENDARY

	PARK HYATT SEOUL	THE SHILLA SEOUL
Location	In the centre of the Gangnam District , opposite the COEX Convention and Exhibition Center, this is the place to be for businesspeople, foodies and shopaholics	In the Jung District, neighbouring Mount Namsan , it's near The National Theater of Korea, Myeong-dong and Deoksugung Palace
Décor	Occupies an avant-garde glass-fronted building, with minimalist interior design by Super Potato using elements of Myanmar oak and stone	A perfect blend of traditional Korean aesthetics and contemporary style , consisting of a former state guest house and a new building juxtaposed with greenery
Clientele	 Lee Young-ae, Hugh Jackman and José Carreras	 State leaders and members of the royal family have stayed here, and celebrities including Jang Dong-gun have held weddings at the hotel
Rooms	The stripped-down rooms have floor-to-ceiling windows providing stunning city views; the karst cave-style all-granite bathrooms have rain showers and Aesop toiletries	The 463 guest rooms have just been refurbished by designer Peter Remedios, using light textiles and dark wood; bathrooms have a smart toilet and Molton Brown toiletries
Food & Drink	Grilled meats, seafood and home-made desserts at Cornerstone are all worth trying; The Timber House hosts live performances and serves high-quality Japanese cuisine and drinks	Four restaurants – the Continental, Palsun, Ariake and La Yeon – serve up French, Chinese, Japanese and Korean food respectively. The Parkview offers all-day dining with cuisine from around the world
Strengths	The 17m infinity pool on the 24th floor gives you a bird's eye view of Gangnam District; unique design and a refined atmosphere	Lots of great contemporary art; the in-house Shilla Designer Brand Arcade is right across from the Shilla Duty Free Shop; the Guerlain Spa is extremely relaxing
Weaknesses	It's easy to get lost in the labyrinthine layout of the hotel	Although nothing bad can be said about the food and drink at the restaurants, the prices are a little high
Wi-Fi	Free	Free
Price	Doubles from AED 1,370	Doubles from AED 830
Contact	995-14 Daechi 3-Dong Gangnam-Gu; 0082-2-2016 1234, seoul.park.hyatt.com	202 Jangchung-Dong 2-Ga, Jung-Gu; 0082-2-2233 3131, shilla.net/seoul





RETREAT

BANYAN TREE CLUB & SPA SEOUL

An **urban oasis in the Namsan District**, about 10 minutes by car from Seoul city centre

The hotel consists of three buildings, the Club, the Hotel and the Festa, with **inspiration drawn from the four seasons and the five elements of Chinese philosophy**, allowing it to blend with the surrounding natural landscape

People looking for a respite from the city; the romantic and secluded atmosphere is **ideal for honeymooners or anniversaries**

The 34 spacious guest rooms come with a **deep relaxation pool** and a walk-in wardrobe, as well as unparalleled views of Mount Namsan



Granum Dining Lounge provides a buffet of eastern and western cuisine in the morning; for lunch and dinner, it offers à la carte Pan-Asian dishes; The Festa Bistro & Bar has the **ambience of a French café**

The Oasis Outdoor Pool is an excellent refuge from the heat of summer days and **in winter the pool transforms into an ice rink**

The **food and service standards could be better**; the spa treatments are a little pricey

Free

Doubles from **AED 2,800**

San 5-5, Jang Chung-Dong 2-Ga Jung-Gu; 0082-2-2250 8000, banyantreeclub.com



BUSINESS

CONRAD SEOUL

In the **International Finance Centre on Yeouido Island**, surrounded by clusters of office buildings and company headquarters

Located in a **smart-tech super-skyscraper** with a minimal, fashionable, contemporary interior style

Senior executives from multinational companies, **diplomatic staff and Hollywood stars**

The 434 guest rooms have views of the Han River. Guests can choose **toiletries from Aromatherapy, Tara Smith or Shanghai Tang**



37 Grill & Bar serves great beef and seafood; Atrio specialises in Italian cuisine; Zest plays with Japanese, Mediterranean and Korean flavours



Rooms are spacious with great views and comprehensive, up-to-date facilities

You have to pay for Wi-Fi and the **internet speed is slow**; service standards have room for improvement

AED 70 per day

Doubles from **AED 1,090**

23-1 Yeouido-Dong, Yeongdeungpo-Gu; 0082-2-6137 7000, conradhotels.com



STYLISH

W SEOUL - WALKERHILL

Situated on Walkerhill, there are a cluster of shopping centres, restaurants and entertainment hubs nearby

The decadent music and **sensory splendour of the design** are exciting

People from the fashion world on the lookout for new trends, and South Korean celebrities



The pure-white minimalist guest rooms feature touches of red and neon that draw the eye; many of the rooms are equipped with **large round beds and round bathtubs**

Kitchen excels in wood-fired and home-style dishes from all over the world; at Namu you can sample **contemporary Japanese fare** accompanied by *soju*

The staff are efficient; the design is pleasantly surprising; **rooms overlooking the Han River and Mount Achanan** are stunning

The hotel can get very full on weekends and the **lobby is sometimes filled with noisy guests and tourists**

Free

Doubles from **AED 975**

177, Walkerhill-Ro, Gwangjin-Gu; 0082-2-465 2222, starwoodhotels.com

The debate



Can voluntourism do more harm than good?



YES

JUSTIN FRANCIS

Managing director, Responsible Travel



NO

DANIELLE WILSON NAQVI

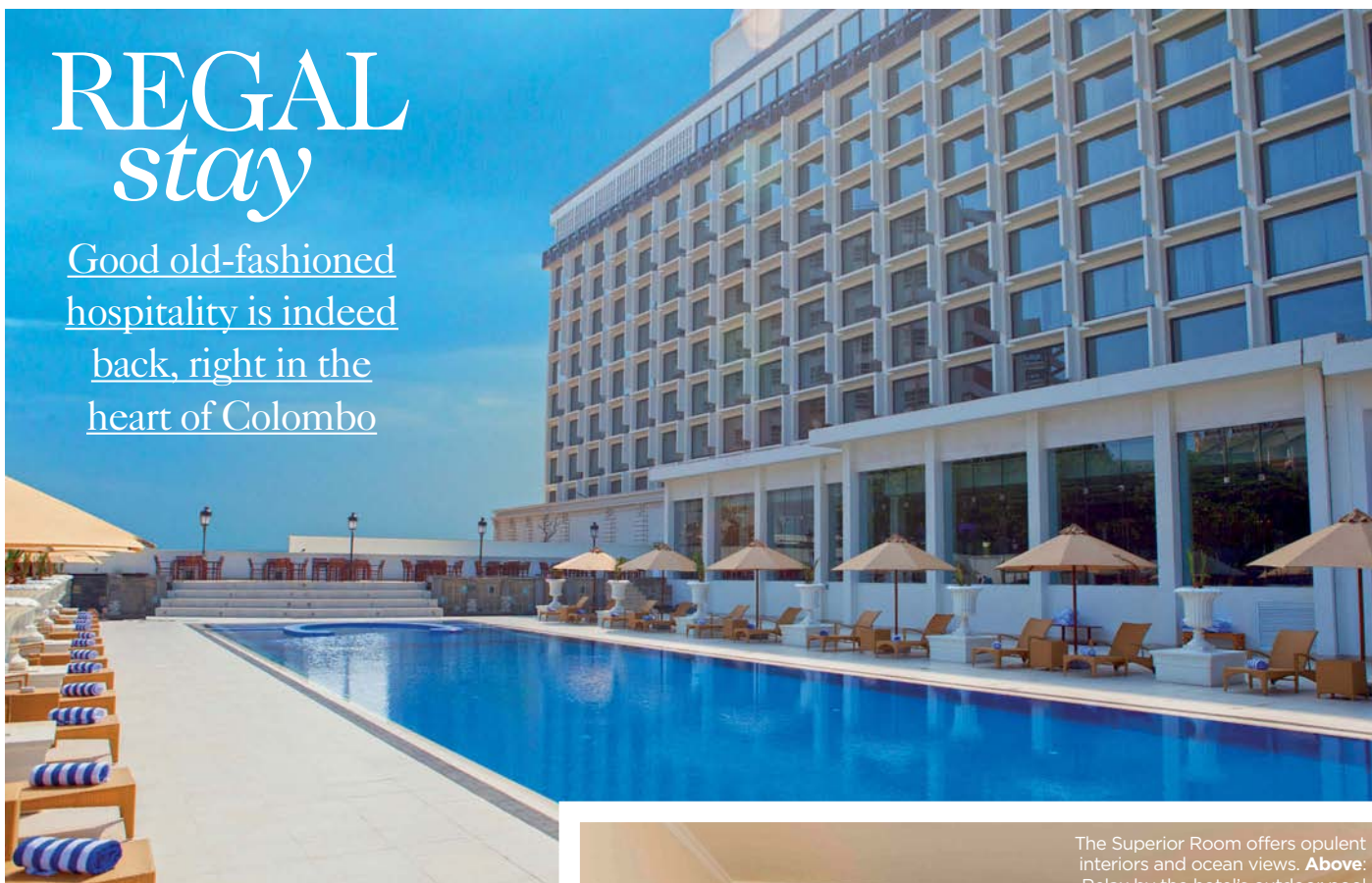
Co-founder of The ZB Foundation and founder of CSPR Group

"In a sector where opportunities can be driven by profit rather than people, there are undoubtedly concerns around voluntourism. In 2013, Responsible Travel removed all orphanage volunteering trips from its site after an extensive period of research which brought to light concerns that well-meaning volunteers can inadvertently cause more harm than good. Worryingly, short-term voluntourism appears to be creating a surge in residential care homes; with a population of less than 100,000, the city of Siem Reap – gateway to the famous Angkor Wat – has 35 orphanages, with parents tempted to give up their children in response to Western ideals of education and upbringing. There are also real concerns around the emotional impact on children of a constant revolving door of unskilled volunteers reinforcing feelings of abandonment and loss. We've now developed a set of strict guidelines, in conjunction with experts and NGOs, including a minimum length of stay, the need for appropriate professional qualifications and background checks. Any voluntourism in orphanages or similar settings must now adhere to these guidelines to put child welfare, not profits, back at the heart of volunteer experiences."

"The fact that someone is willing to sacrifice their well-earned down time to make the world a better place is an act of selflessness rare in today's world of material gains and rampant consumerism. It's also a very personal endeavour; rather than throwing coins in a proverbial collection tin thousands of kilometres away, you get to breathe, feel and live the act of giving and helping a disadvantaged community in a hands-on way. Nothing beats the pride of imparting valuable lessons of teamwork, health and leadership to children with eager, hungry minds – so long as you work with a responsible organisation that takes the time to find the right match for placements. Voluntourism that is sustainable is also more impactful. Whether it's helping to build a house, school or library, or cleaning up debris along the world's shores on your holiday, it's likely to become a life-changing effort rather than a one-time act. For conservation projects, the impact on the animals or biodiversity does not depend on developing personal relationships: often they might just need an extra hand on deck to do data inputting. So it won't make much difference if you are there only for a short period – yet the long-term impact will be worth your few minutes of sacrifice."

REGAL *stay*

Good old-fashioned
hospitality is indeed
back, right in the
heart of Colombo



Located on the banks of the Indian Ocean, in the heart of Sri Lanka's commercial capital Colombo, The Kingsbury is both business and entertainment central. The World Trade Centre, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, shopping malls, clubs, pubs, restaurants as well as historical and cultural sites are all just across the road from The Kingsbury.

The opulent hotel houses 229 sea-facing rooms and suites featuring classic design with a contemporary twist with soft, earthy tones in the rooms and aquamarine hues in the suites. Along with free Wi-Fi, each guest room, ranging from superior to a presidential suite, contains spacious wardrobes and indulgent Bulgari amenities.

The Kingsbury's intimate dining experiences range from international cuisine at Harbour Court and Chinese fare at Yue Chuan to delectable seafood at The Ocean. Amongst its bars is the Sky Lounge, the epicentre of Colombo nightlife. The hotel also boasts many banquet venues that cater to corporate and social events. Guest facilities include a state-of-the-art gymnasium, a business centre, an Executive Lounge and concierge services.

After a long day of sightseeing, unwind on a sunlounger by the pool while sipping tropical cocktails and indulging in snacks and tapas, or head down to the Senses Spa where the Thai treatments are guaranteed to rid even the most stubborn jet lag.

*For more information call 0094-11-2-42 1221
or visit theKingsbury.lk*



A photograph of two mannequins in a museum display. They are wearing traditional Chinese patterned dresses, one with a yellow and black floral pattern and the other with a blue and white floral pattern. The background is a light blue wall with a large window. The mannequins are standing on a dark, reflective surface. The title 'MADE IN CHINA' is overlaid in large white letters.

MADE IN CHINA

There's a style turnaround happening in 2015. Instead of China gobbling up Western fashion, home-grown designers are now being devoured. The country's economic development is fuelling the trend. So is Peng Liyuan, China's stylish first lady, who sparked a frenzy among fashion editors when she wore a navy Ma Ke trench on a 2013 state visit to Moscow. "The world wants to learn more about China and fashion is the easiest way," says Beijing haute couturier Guo Pei. The starting gun was sounded in 2010 when *X-Men* star Fan Bingbing wowed at the Cannes Film Festival in a yellow-and-gold Laurence Xu gown. "Five years earlier it wasn't possible to buy Chinese designers, even in China," says Gemma Williams, author of *Fashion China*, the first anthology to document the country's top talents. According to Huishan Zhang, whose lace confections were a hit at last September's London Fashion Week: "Not all Chinese design is about dragons and the colour red." The Costume Institute at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art is also endorsing this fast-emerging scene; its big spring exhibition, *Chinese Whispers: Tales Of The East In Art, Film And Fashion* (on till August 16), is placing designers, including Ma Ke, alongside the *chinoiserie* of Tom Ford and Giorgio Armani. ▶

WORDS: MELANIE ABRAMS; PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES; CORBIS; NICOLAS GUERIN, JONATHAN WAITER; PAOLO ROVERSI; STUDIO TM, FAKE NATOO, BILL FARRELL/BFA.COM

Travel in style

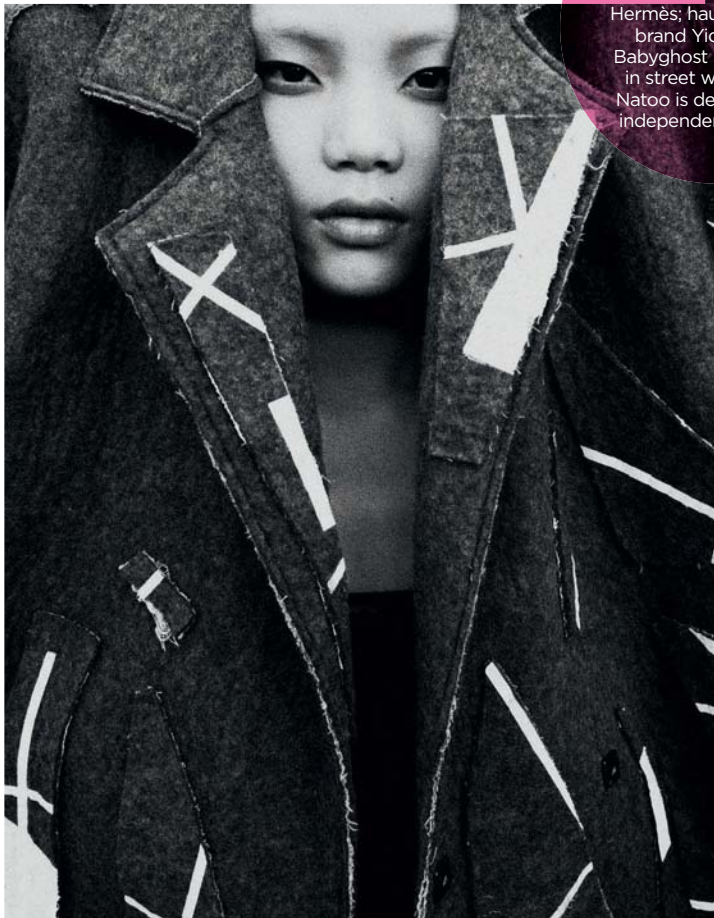
STYLE GUIDE ■ HOW TO PACK ■ GEORGE ESQUIVEL



China-inspired designs
(including Chinese couturier
Guo Pei's creation, far right)
on display at the Metropolitan
Museum of Art in New York



Clockwise from top left: Shang Xia is a high-end Chinese label backed by Hermès; haute couture brand Yiqing Yin; Babyghost specialises in street wear; Fake Natoo is designed for independent women



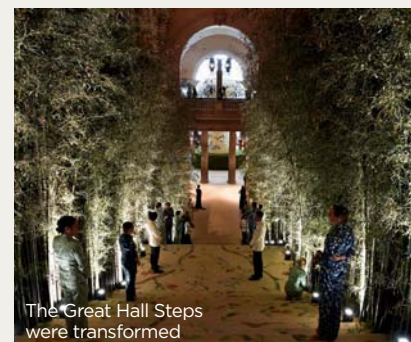


From left: FFIXXED is a unisex, prêt-à-porter fashion label; Digest Design's Liberty collection is about freedom of expression



CHINA: THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

These stars looked East for inspiration for this year's Met Gala theme



The Great Hall Steps were transformed

RIHANNA

The only celebrity to wear a Chinese couture designer on the red carpet, the pop star made a dramatic entrance in an imperial yellow Guo Pei cape inspired by royalty with baroque-style embroidery, fur trim and a voluminous train that weighed 25kg and took the designer two years to make.



FAN BINGBING

The Chinese actress represented her country in a sequinned dress and cape by home-grown label Christopher Bu, inspired by the Forbidden City, with embroidery reflective of the architectural style of the Qing Dynasty.

SARAH JESSICA PARKER

Though not wearing a Chinese designer, the former Met Gala co-chair opted for a striking East Asian-inspired look with a custom H&M gown embellished with a tapestry-style runner, topped off with a theatrical fiery red headpiece by Philip Treacy.



THE NAMES TO KNOW



HAUTE COUTURE GUO PEI

Beijing-based Guo shot to international attention after designing the costumes for the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Her opulent pieces have cloud, water and wave motifs, and fans include *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* actress Zhang Ziyi and Lady Gaga. This year, she will show for the first time at Paris Haute Couture Week and launch a diffusion line.



AVANT-GARDE BAN XIAO XUE

China's rising fashion star started his Guangzhou label in 2012, the same year he won the Asian final of the International Woolmark Prize. Known for his innovative use of silk, wool and other natural fibres, he changes textures, creates new silhouettes and mashes up old and new China. This season, traditional embroidery appears on modern grid material.



STREET STYLE BABYGHOST

Shandong-born Qiaoran Huang and New Yorker Joshua Hupper are the creative duo behind this fast-growing label. Just five years old, the brand showed at New York Fashion Week for the first time last September.

The tough yet girly style - wolf heads and tattoo-inspired graphics with lace - seamlessly fuses the East with Downtown Manhattan. **CNT**

THE WEEKENDER

Classic holdalls, with plenty of room for your gear, are made for a hassle-free mini break



1 Boston holdall, AED 10,915, **dunhill**

2 Nightflight Cabin Bag,
AED 2,595, **Montblanc**

3 Canvas and leather trim duffel,
AED 5,015, **Ralph Lauren**

4 Astralis 55 Taiga bag, AED 12,500,
Louis Vuitton

5 Canvas bag, AED 14,404, **Hermès**

6 Oversized Bayswater bag,
AED 5,950, **Mulberry**

WORDS: JENNY KING; STYLE: SABINA PARKINSON; PHOTO: EFRAIM VIDOR; LOCATION: PENTHOUSE RESIDENCE SUITE AT INTERCONTINENTAL DUBAI MARINA





5000-1110-NAKA
with canvas strap,
AED 37,750,
Blancpain at Rivoli



Big Pilot's Watch
Top Gun Miramar,
AED 60,000,
IWC Schaffhausen



Radiomir Black Seal
Ceramica - 45 mm,
AED 32,000, **Panerai**

JUNGLE FEVER

*Durable timepieces
with canvas straps in
earthy hues complete
your look and blend
into the wild*

WORDS: RHEA SARAN; STYLE: SABINA PARKINSON; WOODEN BRANCH, TABLE CLOTH, TABLE RUNNER AND JEWELLERY: BOX, ALL WEST ELM; LEICA BINOCULARS: AED 7135 AT SALAM STORES



Originals Camper,
AED 200, **Timex**
at Hour Choice



Formula 1 Cristiano
Ronaldo CR7 Limited
Edition, AED 5,730,
TAG Heuer



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MAYAN STYLE

Accessories designer **NATHALIE TRAD** on packing for a Mexican beach break in Tulum

- 1** Dress, AED 1,390, **Melissa Odabash** at matchesfashion.com
- 2** Bikini top, AED 535, and bottoms, AED 535, both **Orlebar Brown** at Boutique 1
- 3** Sunglasses, AED 1,255, **Illesteva** at Boutique 1
- 4** Cuff, AED 2,560, **Aurélie Bidermann** at net-a-porter.com
- 5** Rubin Clutch - Mother of Pearl x Tangerine Resin, AED 6,360, **Nathalie Trad**
- 6** Top and skirt set, AED 573, **Mochi**
- 7** Shoes, AED 1,435, **Proenza Schouler** at Boutique 1

HOT TIP

Store loose objects like hairbands and earphones in a sunglasses case to keep them organised

Tulum is among the world's hottest destinations for 2015, with ancient Mayan sites and broad, white beaches bordered by the turquoise waters of the Caribbean Sea, calling for a cool, care-free wardrobe in fun prints and earthy neutrals. A white lace dress over a bikini with comfy flats is a multi-purpose outfit that will see Trad through a day of exploring the lagoons, beaches and part of the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System at the UNESCO

World Heritage site, Sian Ka'an biosphere reserve. A bold, ethnic-print skirt and top paired with retro round sunglasses are ideal for taking in the ruins of the walled city of Tulum, before dining on fresh fish at Casa Violeta then retiring to the rustic-chic Coqui Coqui hotel, surrounded by lush jungle. Just add a metallic cuff and a mother of pearl clutch to take the look from day to night, and don't forget the vintage camera to capture all that history.



TRAVELLER PROMOTION

HOME AWAY from home

Escape to Amilla Fushi in the
Maldives' idyllic Baa Atoll for an
unforgettable family getaway



Sea views from
the beachfront
Fish & Chip Shop

Located on UNESCO-protected land, Amilla Fushi – meaning “my island home” – is a family-friendly resort offering an understated and modern take on traditional Maldivian design.

Guests can choose from the Lagoon House, offering uninterrupted views of the sunset; the one- or two-bedroom Ocean Lagoon House, which houses an outdoor terrace; the one- or two-bedroom Beach House featuring a private courtyard; the Ocean Reef House, positioned on the edge of the reef; or the two-bedroom Tree House, nestled between coconut palms. The crowning jewels of the resort are the three- to six-bedroom Beach Residences, offering gourmet kitchens, lavish bathrooms with soaking tubs, private pools and ocean views. Ranging from 200sqm to 2,500sqm, each residence also houses a 42in flat-screen TV and indoor and outdoor showers.

Amilla Fushi offers a host of activities including water sports, tennis, badminton, a kids' club with a designated kids' pool and a play and activities area. Children also have the chance to learn about the resort's own reef with an in-house marine biologist. More experienced divers can explore renowned diving spot the Blue Hole, a short distance from the beach. Later, unwind at The Javvu Spa with its multitude of treatments and massages.

Feast on culinary delights at Bazaar, a dining



The hotel offers
motorised and
non-motorised
water sports



An ocean-facing three-bedroom
Beach Residence. **Left:** The two-
bedroom Beach Houses come
with a private freshwater pool

hub including Wok, Grill, Fresh, Joe's Pizza, Baazaar Bar and the UK-inspired Fish & Chip Shop, or create a picnic with The Emperor General Store's fresh produce and deli-style sandwiches, before grabbing some grape at the Cellar Door. For those in the mood for a more romantic evening, overwater Lonu, headed by internationally renowned chef Luke Mangan, offers an elegant dining experience with award-winning dishes, ocean views and a rooftop sunset bar.

This summer guests can choose from two special offers. Enjoy four nights' accommodation in a Lagoon House with a pool for two adults with daily breakfast, a daily 50-minute spa treatment per person, unlimited use of motorised and non-motorised water sports and return seaplane transfer for two adults for AED 29,385 including taxes and service charges (extra night for AED 6,170). Families can benefit from four nights' accommodation in a two-bedroom Ocean Lagoon House with a pool for two adults and two children, also including daily breakfast, a daily 50-minute spa treatment per person, unlimited use of motorised and non-motorised water sports and a return seaplane transfer for two adults and two children for AED 53,260 including all taxes and service charge (extra night for AED 11,020).

*For more information call 00960-660 6444
or visit amilla.mv*

WALK ON

Laid-back kicks make for summer getaways that are both stylish and comfortable

Tracing their heritage back to footwear worn by indigenous tribes of North America, it's no surprise that moccasins have long been the go-to travel shoe. After all, they were intended for exploration of the great outdoors. In celebration of summer, French shoemaker J.M. Weston – which has been handcrafting men's shoes for over a century in its factory in Limoges – has taken its quintessential leather moccasins and given them a world-traveller makeover. The Le Moc collection is all about journeys, the vivid hues of the calfskin and suede recalling the abstract landscapes of French painter Nicolas de Staël. Light and supple, this more laid-back version of the classic construction is relaxed, elegant and playful – all the things you want to be on vacation.

TRAVEL ESSENTIAL

WORDS: RHEA SARAN; STYLE: SABINA PARKINSON; PHOTO: RICHARD HALL

CNT
Classic

Le Moc suede
moccasins,
AED 1,950,
J.M. Weston



1. Cat-eye sunglasses, AED 1,325, **Khaleda Rajab & Fahad Almarzouq** at Boutique 1
2. Aviator sunglasses, AED 1,950, **Victoria Beckham** at net-a-porter.com
3. Heart sunglasses, **Sretsis**, AED 970 at s*uce On-Sea
4. Glitter sunglasses, AED 970, **Linda Farrow** at s*uce On-Sea
5. Gold frame sunglasses, AED 2,260, **Dior**
6. Nairobi sunglasses, AED 1,400, **L.G.R**
7. Neon sunglasses, AED 1,600, **Fendi**

MIRROR, MIRROR

Add a new dimension to your holiday look with quirky-cool mirrored sunglasses



WORDS: JENNY KING, STYLE: SABINA PARKINSON, PHOTO: RICHARD HALL

CATCH THE BOUQUET

A whiff of peony, a note of jasmine, a hint of apple blossom: spritz on these summer-ready scents for freshness that lasts





- 1 Jo Malone** Peony & Blush Suede Cologne, AED 600
- 2 Chanel** Chance Eau Vive, AED 380
- 3 Nina Ricci** Les Délices de Nina, AED 345
- 4 Kiehl's** Nashi Blossom & Pink Grapefruit, AED 247
- 5 See By Chloé** Si Belle, AED 410
- 6 Marc Jacobs** Daisy Eau So Fresh Sorbet, AED 350
- 7 L'Occitane** Pivoine Flora, AED 259
- 8 Valentino** Valentina Pink, AED 485
- 9 Dior** Miss Dior Blooming Bouquet, AED 380
- 10 Estée Lauder** Modern Muse Limited Edition, AED 544
- 11 Prada** Candy Florale, AED 450



#ADMIDDLEEAST



THE AUTHORITY ON DESIGN, ARCHITECTURE AND LIVING



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The craftsman

*Tumi creative director
GEORGE ESQUIVEL on making
luggage personal – and what to
always pack in your carry-on*

For Esquivel, it all started at a bootmaker in Mexico many years ago with a pair of shoes he had made from a sketch. Since then, his eponymous shoe label has gained a following among musicians and Hollywood stars. A consummate craftsman, it made sense that Tumi – whose story also began in the Americas, when its founder began importing leather bags from Peru – would ask the charismatic Californian to leave his own distinct mark on the luggage line best known for its technology innovation. In time with the brand's 40th anniversary, Esquivel chatted with *CNT* about his southern California aesthetic and what constitutes true luxury in travel.

How are you celebrating the 40th anniversary?

It's a year-long celebration. We're one of the official sponsors of the Mercedes AMG F1 team and Nico Rosberg; we sponsored Americans in Paris, the *Vogue* initiative for new designers. We are collaborating with Public School, which won the CFDA/Vogue Fashion Fund in 2013 – that collection will launch in September. And we have the 1975 commemorative collection of luggage.

What inspired you for this collection?

The inspiration was a little bit of the past and a little bit of who we are today. Our heritage is leather, but we also wanted to pull in the ballistic, which is what makes it modern. I think that when you have the tension of the classic with the modern what you end up with is beautiful.

What do people want from their luggage?

Luxury is not about shiny polish or being expensive, it's about the personal connection. With the previous collection, I added a graphic X to the duffel, and made it more personal with accents. With the Accent Your Alpha kit, you can add a colour on the zippers, which I've been doing to my own bags for years. For this collection, I pushed for leather that is going to wear and age. The next generation of travellers are attached to technology but they also want to capture heritage. We fix thousands of bags a year,



Crossbody bag, AED 2,655, Tumi

and they don't want us to replace it because they love how worn out it is – that scratch happened when I was on this trip, or my father gave me this bag. Luggage can be sentimental. And to me, that is true luxury.

Which cities have most influenced you?

My aesthetic is very southern California casual. The deconstructed blazer that came out of LA is the sort of thing that inspires me. Also, Milan and Paris. I was inspired by the women in Dubai – they really know how to dress. Super chic. Tokyo, for men, is very cool.

What should a world traveller always carry?

Always have a carry-on with a supply for a minimum of two days. Sooner or later you'll get stuck in a city without your luggage. I learnt my lesson when I once got stuck in Frankfurt with some work gear but nothing else for two days – and I don't like to shop under pressure. The second thing is gum. It's very rude to eat and drink and sleep on a plane and then try to talk to someone. I also always take sneakers: they're great for exercise or just walking around a city.

The picture-perfect Santa Barbara coast



'Today's travellers are attached to technology but they also want heritage. Luggage can be sentimental'



Luggage tag from the Accent Your Alpha kit, AED 460, Tumi

What's the best way to pack shoes?

You should wear your favourite shoes on the plane so you know they're going to make it intact. You can cram your sneakers into your carry-on. That way if your bags don't make it, at least you have your essential shoes. And you look chic while travelling, instead of frumpy.

What is your idea of the perfect vacation?

For the past few years, my family and I rent a motorhome and drive up the coast of southern California. In Santa Barbara, there's a spot where you have both the mountains and the beach. You can go to the shore, then go hiking or mountain biking. At night, we do a bonfire and roast marshmallows. I'm not very glamorous when it comes to vacations. I like to keep it simple.

Where should we go in southern California?

Visit the LACMA museum, which is great even for kids. You need to do a hike, either in Laguna Beach or in LA under the Hollywood sign, which is really cool. For restaurants, Animal is so good. There's also great Mexican food. And go to Laguna or Huntington Beach to walk around the seaside towns and down by the water. *CNT*

Living the cream in KRABI

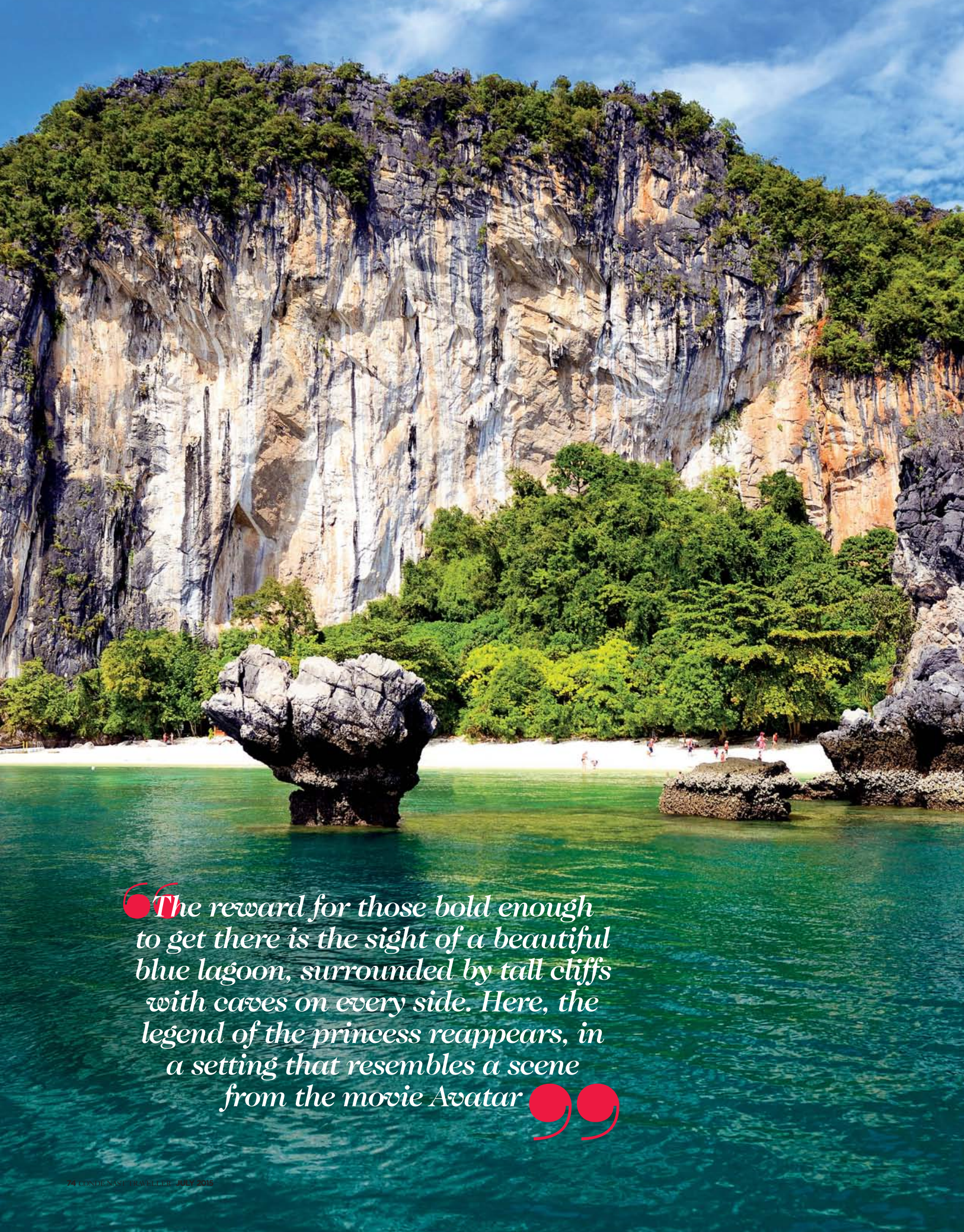
This area of Thailand, bathed in the waters of the Andaman Sea, has inspired many great writers who discovered an ideal of beauty here against which all other beaches are measured. It doesn't matter how perfect you imagine it to be, the reality is better. You'll have to pinch yourself to check you're not dreaming, says **XAVIER MORET**

Photographed by **FÉLIX LORENZO**

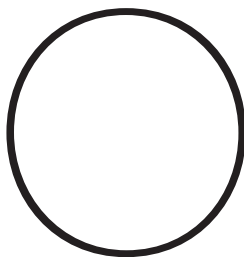


The islands of Phang Nga
Bay in Krabi, the perfect
place to cast anchor





“The reward for those bold enough to get there is the sight of a beautiful blue lagoon, surrounded by tall cliffs with caves on every side. Here, the legend of the princess reappears, in a setting that resembles a scene from the movie Avatar”



IN MY FLIGHT FROM Bangkok to Krabi, I met a young American woman who was reading *The Beach* by Alex Garland, the book that inspired the

2000 Danny Boyle film starring Leonardo DiCaprio. She was so engrossed that she hardly looked up. Only when we landed did she notice me sitting next to her and told me that she was flying to Krabi to catch a boat to the Phi Phi Islands, the backdrop for the “perfect beach” in the film. All I recalled about the film is that there were some hippies (among them the romantic young backpacker played by DiCaprio), a secret map and a beach which, it was rumoured, was the most beautiful in the world. The movie is now quite old, but even on a previous trip I found that the beach in Maya Bay was still something of a legend among travellers, explaining the number of boats arriving there every day from Krabi or Phuket.

“I hope you won’t be disappointed,” I said.

“Why would I be?” she asked, taken aback. “I’ve seen photos and it looks amazing.”

I limited myself to saying that the greater one’s expectations, the less likely they are to be realised. In an attempt to inspire a bit of literary complicity between us, I threw in a quote from Paul Theroux: “As soon as a place gets a reputation for being paradise, it goes to hell.” She didn’t appreciate me being a wet blanket, shrugging me off then ignoring me. I can still see her now, as she slowly drifted off through the airport in Krabi, in a floral print top, hippie sandals and a backpack, with a head full of imagined paradises and *The Beach* in her hand.

The small town of Krabi with its *tuk-tuks*, bars, restaurants and lively night market wasn’t a bad place to start, but I hadn’t come here for the temptations of urban life, but rather to immerse myself in the countryside that surrounds it: the majestic limestone pillars, long sandy beaches, palm groves, labyrinthine mangrove forests and beautiful islands that appear to have risen out of some dream world.

The Tubkaak Boutique Resort, just a few kilometres from the city, was charming enough to keep me from searching for somewhere more remote. It provides an Asian style of luxury: bungalows amid the vegetation, several pools, service with a smile, a restaurant by the sea, massages capable of

transporting you to *One Thousand And One Nights* and a pretty, sandy beach.

It was pleasant lazing about at the Tubkaak, but I was conscious that I hadn’t come to Thailand to hole up in a hotel. So I set out in a kayak, going around the Ao Thalane canyons and the island of Koh Hong – a little miracle of a place – until I got to Tiger Cave Temple, or Wat Tham Suea, 8km from the city.

They say in Krabi that a tiger once lived in the temple cave at the base of a towering limestone pillar, terrorising the locals. Fortunately today, there’s just a sculpture of the tiger, with which you can get your photo taken. The terror remains, however, in the form of the 1,237 steps that lead to the top of the pillar. Yet many visitors take on the challenge – and the persistent nuisance perpetrated by the monkeys en route – to reach the summit and view the big Buddha and take in spectacular vistas that confirm that the province of Krabi, opening out to the sea, is a place they’re privileged to be visiting.

The nearby beach of Ao Nang, speckled with houses and hostels across fine sand, is a good aperitif for the marine charms of the area. From here, it’s worth renting a long-tail boat to visit some of the islands in the bay. ▶



A cabin with a pool that looks like something out of a film in the Tubkaak Boutique Resort. **Opposite:** The sandy beach and clear waters of Koh Hong

Khao Khanap Nam, the 100m twin pillars that serve as a symbol of Krabi, appear upriver once you've left the mangroves behind. Fifteen minutes away in Chao Fah pier is a cave which contains, so it's said, the corpses of fishermen who are believed to have perished in a flood. A stroll around the nearby island of Koh Klang, the closest to the city, gave me a taste of the area's allure, as I made my way amid mangroves to admire the pile dwellings and crossed rice paddies to taste fish prepared with an unmistakably Thai flavour of spices and coconut milk.

From here on, there seemed to be another dimension to the trip, particularly when the long-tail boat took me to the beaches of Rai Leh, or Railay, accessible only by sea. Disembarking on Phra Nang beach, my breath caught and I had to pinch myself several times to convince myself that what I was seeing was real. It really was one of the most beautiful beaches in the world. Everything seemed to be exactly so: the wide stretch of sand, the palm trees backing the beach, the rugged limestone cliffs, the tall rocks, the clear water and the princess cave gaping open at one end of the beach. Tham Phra Nang Nok, the princess cave, is a small

shrine located at the foot of a cliff, as if the rock was torn open at the base to hold the shrine in its bosom. Inside lies a profusion of flowers, candles and sandalwood incense sticks, as well as lots of wooden fertility symbols. One story goes that the wife of a fisherman who died on the high seas lived in the cave. Another, more imaginative version of the tale has it that the ghost of a sea princess lived there and the fertility symbols are considered an offering. Whatever the truth, the cave beside the beach remains a sanctuary for locals and an attraction for tourists.

A short walk from the beach is one of those great hotels that you stumble across in Thailand: the Rayavadee is made up of lots of bungalows sheltered by palm groves, with a large pool and a charming restaurant inside a cave (this one free of ghosts and fertility symbols). Beyond Phra Nang beach is another beach, East Railay, with more sand and more hotels. And on the other side of the isthmus, a third beach frequented by backpackers. Although West Railay beach is the best for swimming, adventure seekers prefer the East beach, which backs on to cliffs that attract climbers from all over the world. French backpackers were the first to arrive,

in the Eighties, and since then more than 100 climbing routes have opened across the cliff face. The beach, however, disappears at low tide and turns into a marsh. East Railay is also home to many bars, restaurants and hostels. There are bars suspended above the water, on wooden platforms lined with mats and cushions on which you can lie and gaze up at the moon. The last of these, with the rather redundant name "The Last Bar", is a good place to watch the sunset while sipping a refreshing drink.

I'm not much of a climber, so I opted for the path up to a viewing platform 160m high atop one of the pillars that towers over the beach. The view from up there is dream-like – you can see the narrow stretch of land covered in Rayavadee's palm grove as well as arcs made by the sandy beaches.

Along the path up to the viewing platform is a sign for a hidden lagoon – the princess lagoon – located in the inner depths of the pillar. It's worth the diversion, despite the mud and the steep path. The reward for those bold enough to get there is the sight of a beautiful blue lagoon, surrounded by tall cliffs with caves on every side. Here, the legend of the princess reappears, in a setting▶



Long-tail boats on the beach of Koh Hong island, 50 minutes from Ao Nang



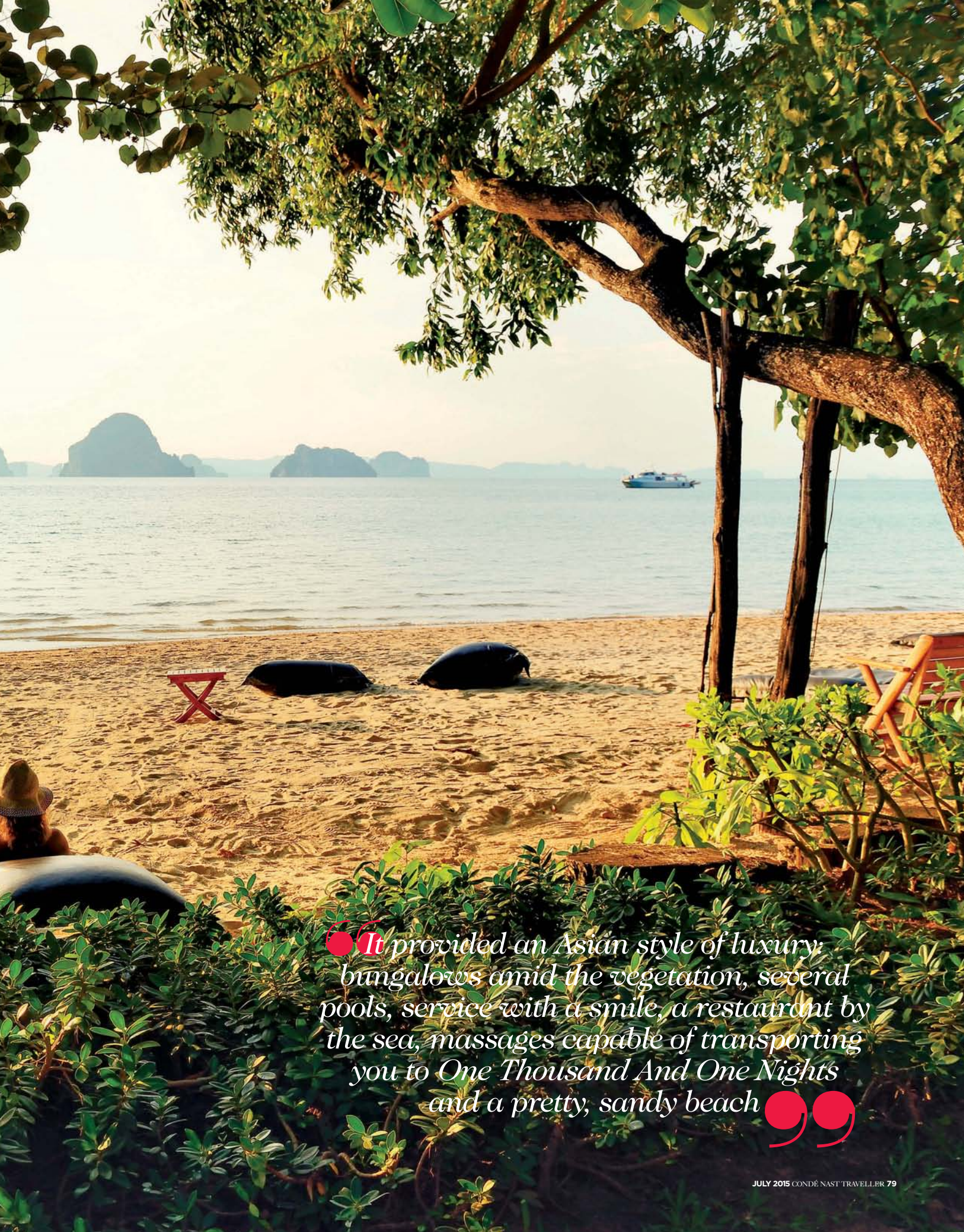
An everyday scene
in Thailand: a
monk travelling by
motorcycle in Krabi



A relaxation area in Point Yamu
by COMO in Phuket, with a
panoramic view of the sea



A beach by The Tubkaak
Boutique Resort, with tall
islands visible in the distance



It provided an Asian style of luxury: bungalows amid the vegetation, several pools, service with a smile, a restaurant by the sea, massages capable of transporting you to *One Thousand And One Nights* and a pretty, sandy beach

that resembles a scene from the movie *Avatar*. Those brave enough to spend a night in the mysterious caves, particularly during full moon, swear to having seen the princess' ghost. Not such a strange declaration in such a fantastical place as this.

HAVING BEEN ENTRANCED BY THE ENIGMATIC beauty of this place, I set sail once more, to explore the many islands near Krabi. The Phi Phi Islands are the region's most famous and are located a couple of hours away. "Who knows?" I thought, "maybe I'll see the girl from the plane again."

The first stop-off was Bamboo Island, one of six islands that make up the Phi Phi archipelago. It's a great place for swimming, diving and taking the stock photographs of "paradise". It was here that I began to wonder if the Phi Phi Islands are the real jewels of Thailand: Bamboo Island is small but has a beach of pure white sand that drops off into the turquoise blue of the sea. The two most famous islands are Phi Phi Don, the biggest, and Phi Phi Leh, where lies Maya Bay and the "perfect beach" DiCaprio and the girl from the plane had gone in search of.

Maya Bay is situated between cliffs and truly does resemble a dream world. This is further confirmed as you approach and see the clear water full of colourful fish and the sandy beach with a backdrop of coconut palms.

"When they filmed *The Beach* in 1999, the producers altered the appearance of

the beach, planting palm trees and moving the sand with bulldozers to give it more a dramatic impact," Pravat, a Thai guide, told me. Environmentalists protested and in the end they left it how it was before. "But with more tourists," I said. "Yes, of course, there are many more tourists," he replied, smiling. The dozens of boats and hundreds of tourists in the bay highlight the success of the big promotional campaign that the film effectively was. The best time to visit is between November and April when the waves are calmer, but there are visitors all year round.

Walking along the beach, I tried to spot the girl from the plane in the crowd. Did she ever arrive at her dream beach? I didn't see her, but I didn't rule out the possibility that she was there. At any rate, bathing in the pristine waters of Maya Bay, surrounded by colourful fish, was an experience to remember.

On Phi Phi Don, the larger island, the scene was quite different. From the viewing platform atop one of the hills, I saw a narrow strip of land connecting beaches on both ends with lots of bars, shops and hotels in the middle. "More than 1,000 people died here as a result of the 2004 tsunami," Pravat told me. The waves swept over the isthmus completely and destroyed everything. You wouldn't know it from looking at it now as everything has been reconstructed. The view is so beautiful

that it seems almost impossible that it was all destroyed at one time.

After a few days on Phi Phi Don, I got on a speedboat that brought me to another famous island in the Andaman Sea, linked by road to mainland Phuket. There were many more hotels and shops here and, of course, more tourists, too. Of all the hotels on Phuket, Point Yamu, run by COMO Hotels and Resorts, is a standout. It has a unique location on Cape Yamu with a 360-degree view of the Andaman Sea and Phang Nga Bay, which contains the spectacular limestone islands where *The Man With The Golden Gun* was filmed. The attention to detail (and Italian designer Paola Navone's predilection for blue and turquoise tones) is evident. Rooms come with large windows, and the suites and villas are equipped with private pools. There are also excellent restaurants (the Nahmyaa Thai Restaurant and the Italian La Sirena), lush vegetation, great massages and a paradise of a beach on which there's a conveniently located hammock.

The desire to explore the other islands, beyond the crazy hubbub of Patong Beach where the mass tourism market and insane shopping of Phuket is concentrated, stayed with me. So I set sail for the small island of Rang Yai, 15 minutes from Phuket. Rang Yai is a private island, covered in palm trees and fronted by turquoise sea and white sand, that sells itself as an ecotourism resort. In addition to some fishermen and pearl cultivators, there are only a bar, a restaurant and a few bamboo bungalows on the island. It was in the door of one of the latter that I spotted the girl from the plane.

"Hello, do you remember me?" I ventured. She was lazing outside in a hammock, looking very tanned and with a book in her hand, the title of which I couldn't see.

"Oh, yes. We met on the plane," she said after a pause.

"Did you go to the Phi Phi Islands already?"

"Yes," she responded, unenthusiastically.

"And what did you think of the 'perfect beach'?"

She looked at me as if I'd said something inappropriate. "It was too crowded," she pouted. "I'd imagined it empty and beautiful, just for me."

"I see," I grinned, "The problem is that a lot of people have the same idea."

"I'm happy here, though," she said with a smile. "I'm going to spend a few days in Rang Yai. The good thing about Thailand is that there is always a beautiful island nearby."

As I took my leave, I saw that the book she was reading had a photo of Ko Tao on the cover, another great Thai marvel further north – though I feared she'd be upset yet again not to have it all to herself. Perhaps that would be her next destination, ever in search of the perfect beach, the perfect place, the perfect trip. **CNT**

At the restaurants at Point Yamu a simple plate of fruit is transformed into a study of shape and a contrast of colours





Ao Thalane in Krabi, a natural clearing in the mangroves that can be navigated in a canoe

Need to know: KRABI

WHERE TO STAY

THE TUBKAAK BOUTIQUE RESORT

Unwind in exotic surroundings at this Mueang boutique hotel. Facilities include a spa, gym, library and several pools. *Doubles from AED 735; 0066-7562 8400, tubkaakresort.com*

RAYAFADEE

Located on Phra Nang beach, RayaFADEE offers its guests the complete luxury experience, with innovative dining menus and rejuvenating spa therapies. *Doubles from AED 1,475; 0066-75-620 7403, rayavadee.com*

SUNRISE TROPICAL RESORT

This private resort houses 28 villas and is located on East Railay beach; guests can relax in the shade of the surrounding tropical gardens. *Doubles from AED 250; 0066-758-194 1820, sunrisetropical.com*

POINT YAMU BY COMO

Overlooking the Andaman Sea on Cape Yamu, this hotel boasts picturesque views of Phang Nga Bay and houses two world-class restaurants, serving Thai and Italian cuisine. *Doubles from AED 760; 0066-76-36 0100, comohotels.com/pointyamu*

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

KRUA THARA

On the far end of Ao Nang Beach, you can order fresh fish at this casual, popular eatery. *0066-7563 7367*

RAILAY PHUTAWAN RESTAURANT

Western and Thai cuisines with views of the lush vegetation and the cliffs of Railay. *railayphutawan.com*

THE LAST BAR

A place to relax as you look out to sea on Railay East beach. Pick your catch from the ice display and they'll cook it to your liking. *0066-7581 8307, railaylastbar.com*

OASIS BAR & RESTAURANT

On the island of Phi Phi Don, serving

delicious Thai food at reasonable prices. *0066-82-807 4704*

WHERE TO SHOP & PLAY

NIGHT MARKET, KRABI TOWN

A lively market full of stalls where you can buy everything at a good price. There are also open-air restaurants serving papaya salad, noodles, prawn soup, oysters and grilled fish at affordable rates.

CLIMBING IN RAILAY

Several agencies organise climbing on the cliffs of the Railay peninsula, including Tex Rock Climbing (*0066-818-91 1528, tex-rockclimbing.com*) and King Climbers (*0066-75-66 2096*).

THAI COOKING CLASSES

Aonang Thai Cookery School is a good spot to learn how to make local cuisine. *From AED 110; aonangthaicookeryschool.com*

Getting there

Emirates (*emirates.com*) and Thai Airways (*thaiairways.com*) fly to Krabi via Bangkok



The private, eco-friendly island of Rang Yai is a 15-minute boat ride from Phuket



Lounging poolside at Point Yamu by COMO



Clockwise from top left: Jardine House, one of Hong Kong's tallest buildings; Mimi Brown, the founder of Spring Workshop; neon signs in Kowloon; Almine Rech gallery at Art Basel

ART LOVER'S

HONG KONG

SAMANTHA KUOK LEESE
finds out what makes it
the Next Big City for art

EW COULD HAVE PREDICTED THE RISE OF HONG Kong as an art destination. The city's always been known for its skyscraper-studded skyline, finance community and stylish shoppers – but as a destination for art and culture? Yet today, art insiders around the world speak of Hong Kong in the same way they speak of Berlin and São Paulo: their voices drop to whispers as if they're sharing a treasured secret; their tone becomes urgent and excited.

No greater proof of Hong Kong's arrival on the circuit exists than the launch of Art Basel here in 2013, making it a part of the prestigious group that includes Basel, Switzerland and Miami Beach, Florida. The fair was a “game changer” for Hong Kong, says Doryun Chong, chief curator for the gallery M+, adding that the organisers are very selective in their choice of cities. “The Hong Kong arts scene is no doubt at its most vibrant during the Art Basel fair,” says Yana Peel, CEO of Intelligence Squared Group and a major local advocate of the arts. The annual event (which took place from March 15-17 this year) attracts a glamorous set not only to the fair but also to the galleries and hip haunts around town for a whirlwind of exhibitions, debates, performances, parties and other attractions.

Hong Kong's rapid rise as a cultural destination is nothing short of extraordinary.

And Nick Buckley Wood of Pearl Lam Galleries predicts that in the coming decades it “will be a hugely important, if not the most important place for the art market because this is where the money is”. The city's commercial advantages are clear. Sundaram Tagore, director of three galleries worldwide (sundaramtagore.com), lists them easily: Hong Kong is a free port (which translates to an avoidance of taxation of up to 30 per cent on art purchases), with a business-savvy population. Very significantly, it provides matchless access to affluent art collectors across Asia, especially in mainland China where collectors are on a global buying spree.

These unique circumstances have helped attract a new set of cosmopolitan expats to Hong Kong – people from around the world who are helping to galvanise interest in the arts. A number of influential galleries have opened branches in Hong Kong and the commercial art scene is booming. London's famous White Cube, which represents big-name artists such as Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin and Jake and Dinos Chapman, opened an outpost in Hong Kong in 2012; its senior director, Graham Steele, says the response to the gallery's programme has been “overwhelmingly positive”, and describes a “critical mass” of energy surrounding the arts in Hong Kong. ▶



The artsy interiors of Bibo restaurant and bar

In a city where every inch of real estate is worth a fortune, an appreciation for public art is also slowly growing – thanks in large part to a pair of playful exhibitions. First, in May 2013, Dutch artist Florentijn Hofman made waves by installing his 54ft inflatable Rubber Duck in Victoria Harbour. “A duck craze has taken over,” wrote *The Asian Sentinel*, “the latest of many periodic fads to inundate Hong Kong – but it is different. It is gratuitously nice, and fun, for no discernible reason, a near miracle in this city.” And last summer, flash mobs of 1,600 *papier-mâché* pandas by French artist Paulo Grangeon captured people’s imagination and raised awareness about endangered pandas, said to now number only 1,600 in the wild.

While there’s still progress to be made at a local grassroots level, pioneering non-commercial organisations such as Asia Art Archive (aaa.org.hk), Para Site (para-site.org.hk) and Spring Workshop (springworkshop.org/en) “have catalysed innovation in new communities,” says Peel. That innovative spirit can also be found in a crop of new hotels, restaurants, cafés and bars that focus on art and design. These cool, creative spaces are opening up amidst the shiny

towers and warehouses of Hong Kong. Here’s what not to miss on your next trip.

ART GALLERIES PEDDER BUILDING

Amid the skyscrapers and malls, this heritage building is home to six galleries. Hanart TZ ([0085-225-26 9019](tel:0085-225-269019)) and Pearl Lam (pearllam.com) are well known as specialists in Chinese and other Asian contemporary art. At Gagosian (gagosian.com), recent exhibitions have included works by spray-paint artist Sterling Ruby and drawings by Alberto Giacometti, while Lehmann Maupin (lehmannmaupin.com) has presented installation and multimedia artists such as Do Ho Suh and Hernan Bas. Simon Lee Gallery (simonleegallery.com) has shown Toby Ziegler and Mai-Thu Perret, while Ben Brown Fine Arts’ (benbrownfinearts.com) latest highlights include a solo show by Ye Linghan, a young Chinese multimedia artist.

50 CONNAUGHT ROAD CENTRAL

A short walk from Pedder Building, the simplified classical façade of this address stands out against the sleek towers of Hong Kong’s central business district. London

gallery White Cube (whitecube.com) occupies a space that was originally designed as a bank hall and held an outstanding exhibition of new works by Mark Bradford during Art Basel in 2014. Over the same period, the Parisian Galerie Perrotin (perrotin.com), on the 17th floor, presented glass sculptures by Jean-Michel Othoniel and photography by Ryan McGinley.

DUDELL STREET

At the end of this cul-de-sac are a pair of gas lamps and a flight of stone steps that go back to Hong Kong’s colonial days. Nearby, Edouard Malingue Gallery (edouardmalingue.com) focuses on emerging and established contemporary artists. In 2013, the gallery presented “Pentateuque” by Fabien Mérelle, a life-size sculpture in Statue Square of an elephant on a man’s back. “The gallery is dedicated to building an art historical dialogue that emanates from Hong Kong,” says Development Officer Jennifer Ellis. Higher up, on the eighth floor of Club Lusitano, de Sarthe Gallery (desarthe.com) has shown an impressive collection of works by the pioneers of modern Chinese painting in Paris, such as Xu Beihong and Zao Wou-Ki, as well as contemporary figures like Wang Guofeng and Lin Jingjing.

OTHER GALLERIES

A nexus of art galleries and studios (many of whom are fleeing the high rents of downtown) is growing in the industrial areas of Wong Chuk Hang and Chai Wan. These communities often organise events during Art Basel, giving visitors a chance to see a unique side of Hong Kong’s cultural scene. Spring Workshop (springworkshop.org), for example, was founded by music producer Mimi Brown as a non-profit artists’ residency programme – the first of its kind in Hong Kong. Visitors are welcome in the huge, converted warehouse space, where there are snacks and comfortable spots to hang out and read. Two of Hong Kong’s most exciting home-grown art spaces, Osage in Kwun Tong (osagegallery.com) and Para Site (para-site.org.hk) in Quarry Bay, are also worth a visit.

INSTITUTIONS, SPACES AND FAIRS

ART BASEL HONG KONG

“Art Basel’s show in Hong Kong is a premier event on the international art calendar and the leading annual art show in Asia,” says Magnus Renfrew, Art Basel’s Director Asia. The fair hosts leading galleries from Asia and around the world, presenting more than 3,000 emerging and established artists, as well as highlighting new developments in the visual arts. Shireen Gandhi, owner/director of Chemould Prescott Road in ▶



A mural livens up the terrace of Ovolo Southside hotel

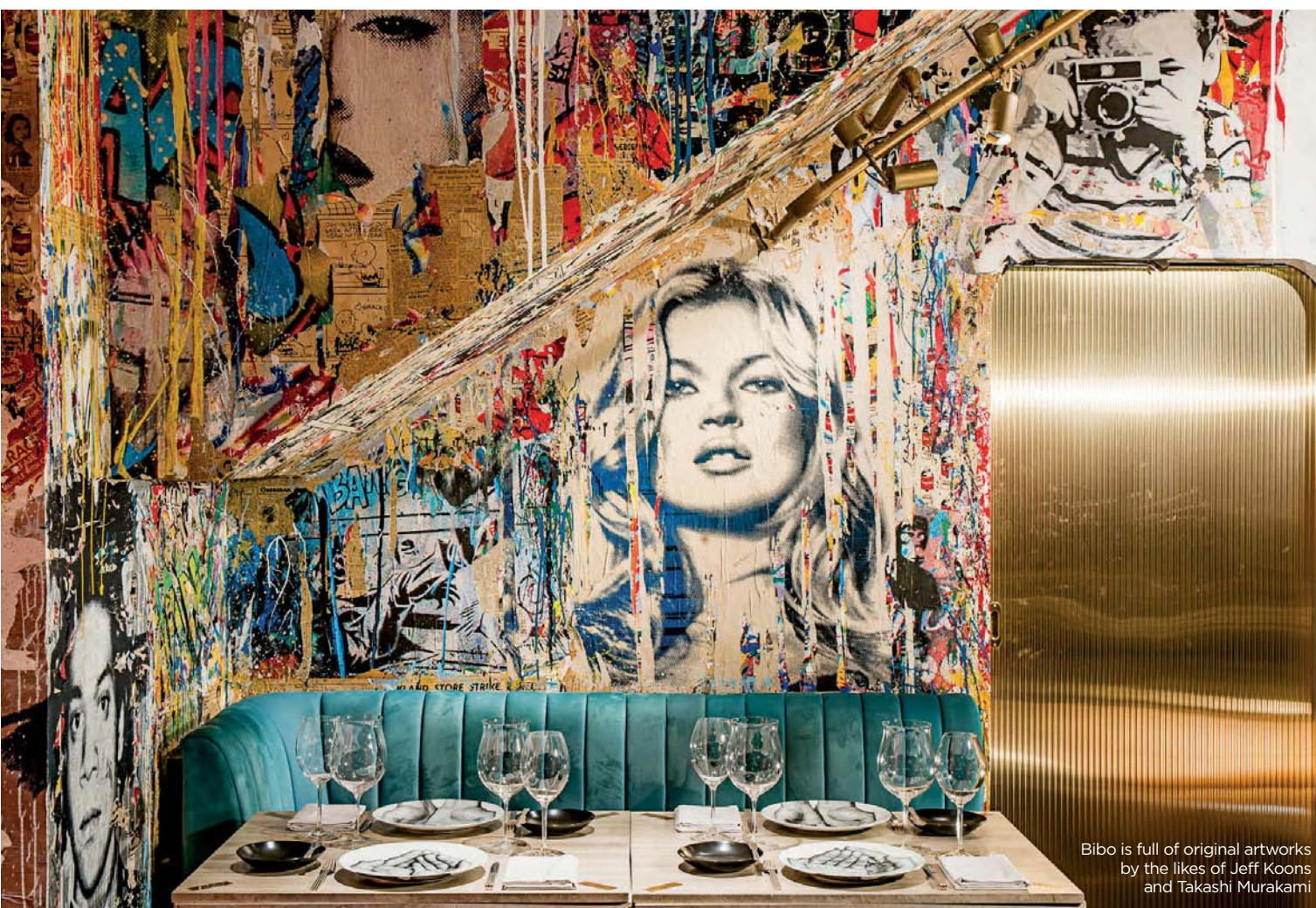


Bibo's resident mixologist,
Alexandre Chatte

Clockwise from top left:
An exhibition at White Cube;
Jeffrey Leung and Felix Tai
of POMCH, a store in PMQ;
artwork at Pace Gallery,
on show at Art Basel; the
Herman Miller store in
PMQ; Osage Gallery

No greater proof of Hong Kong's arrival on the circuit exists than the launch of Art Basel here, making it part of the prestigious group that includes Basel, Switzerland and Miami Beach, Florida





Bibo is full of original artworks by the likes of Jeff Koons and Takashi Murakami

Mumbai is a member of the eight-person selection committee of Art Basel Hong Kong. “That a local art fair in Hong Kong was taken over by Art Basel is in itself an indication of how hot Asia is,” she says. “Things have gotten more diverse and serious, people fly in from across the world and each night there are show openings in spaces across Hong Kong. The audience is already conversant with art from China, India and Southeast Asia – though they tend to prefer the big name artists and full-bodied works.” In 2014, Hong Kong-born artist Nadim Abbas was commissioned by Absolut to create a pop-up Art Bar, following a similar, successful project by Adrian Wong in 2013. The cocktail-bar-as-art-installation is a trend that continued this year with Wong devising an installation with Absolut for Fringe Club featuring a robot band. Other satellite events also took place, including collaborations with local cultural institutions, public exhibitions, open studio days, evening gallery walks and the annual art-themed Intelligence Squared debate.

artbasel.com

M+, WEST KOWLOON CULTURAL DISTRICT

M+ (westkowloon.hk/en/mplus), the new museum for visual arts in Hong Kong, set to open in 2017-2018, will likely form the core of the West Kowloon Cultural District (westkowloon.hk) – a long-anticipated government project to create a cultural quarter on the harbour front of West Kowloon. Chief curator Doryun Chong describes M+ as “a fully functioning museum without the building”, and says its collection from Hong Kong and greater China will be unmatched. More than 3,000 entries are now on the museum’s record, of which half were donated by Switzerland’s Uli Sigg, possibly the world’s most influential collector of contemporary Chinese art. Already, M+ has mounted innovative mobile exhibitions and engaged with the community through public talks known as M+ Matters. The museum is also responsible for curating the Hong Kong Pavilion at the Venice Biennale: Tsang Kin-Wah was the artist selected to represent Hong Kong at this year’s show, following Lee Kit in 2013. Chong is confident that the museum

will play a “critical role” in Hong Kong’s continued development as an international hub for contemporary art.

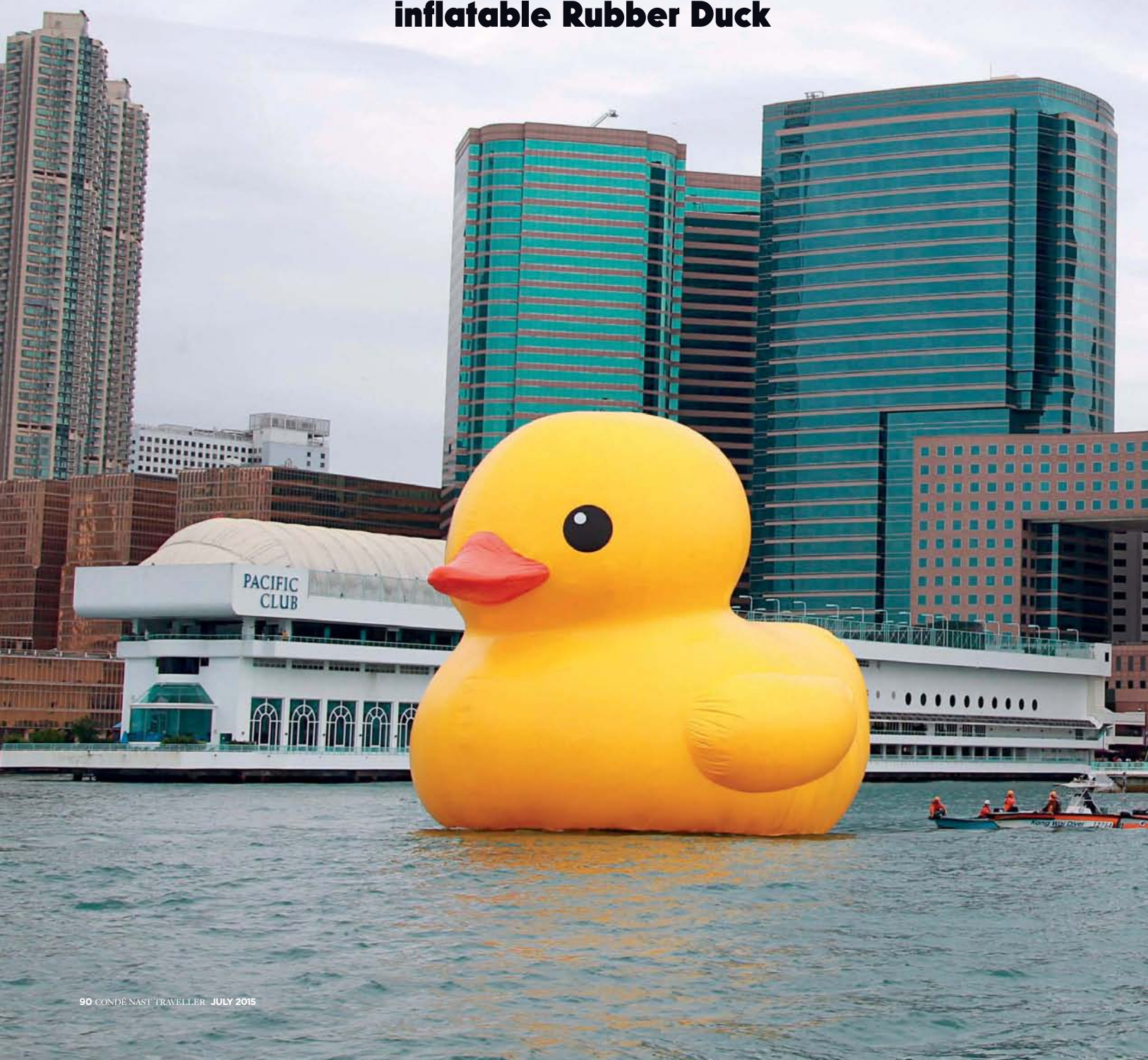
ASIA SOCIETY

The Asia Society Hong Kong Center was established at the Old Victoria Barracks’ Former Explosives Magazine site in February 2012. Through careful and clever restoration and refurbishment, the four British military buildings have been transformed into a cultural, artistic and intellectual hub. The most impressive exhibition to date took place in March 2014, when the Society gave people a rare opportunity to see Caravaggio’s Baroque masterpiece, “Supper at Emmaus”.
[0085-221-039511, asiasociety.org](http://0085-221-039511.asiasociety.org)

AFFORDABLE ART FAIR

The brand’s eponymous debut in Hong Kong in 2013 was the most successful launch in its history. The Affordable Art Fair, which took place from May 22-24 this year, presents thousands of original paintings and prints, as well as a range of works in sculpture and photography, valued between AED 470▶

**In a city where every inch of
real estate is worth a fortune,
an appreciation for public
art is growing – thanks to
playful exhibitions such as
artist Florentijn Hofman's 54ft
inflatable Rubber Duck**



The giant Rubber Duck
in Victoria Harbour



and AED 47,000. Talks and other activities surround the fair, and visitors can discover up-and-coming local artists at the Young Talent Hong Kong exhibition. "There's something for every budget and taste," says Will Ramsay, who created the Affordable Art Fair in London in 1999. Ramsay also co-founded ART HK, which was taken over by Art Basel in Hong Kong, and is a shareholder in Art India. 0085-235-79 4777, affordableartfair.com/hongkong

PMQ

One of the most promising additions to Hong Kong's hip Sheung Wan neighbourhood is the creative cluster of PMQ, which opened in May 2014 in the former Police Married Quarters, off Hollywood Road. The revitalised Fifties complex is quickly turning into a hub of art and culture with its galleries, design studios and stores such as Herman Miller and POMCH, as well as chic restaurants, cafés and bars. Look out for events such as the Night Market, when the ground-floor atrium is transformed into a vibrant bazaar for local artists, designers, musicians and chefs to showcase their talent. 0085-228-70 2335; pmq.org.hk

WHERE TO STAY OVOLO SOUTHSIDE

This warehouse-to-hotel conversion in the up-and-coming creative area of Wong Chuk Hang is within walking distance of a number of art galleries and design outlets. Different artists were commissioned for the hotel's decoration. The corridors feature murals by Hong Kong's most exciting street artists, Parent's Parents. Request a corner room for the best view and use of space. *Doubles from AED 330; 0085-234-60 8100, ovolo.com*

THE UPPER HOUSE & EAST

At Upper House (*doubles from AED 2,130; 0085-239-68 1111, upperhouse.com*), designer Andre Fu has created the most spacious guest rooms in town that attract a stylish clientele. Art events take place at the hotel year-round. The public areas display works by artists such as Man Fung-Yi and Hirostoshi Sawada, while the bar at Café Gray on the 49th floor offers spectacular views of Victoria Harbour. The House's sister hotel, East (*doubles from AED 780; 0085-239-68 3968, east-hongkong.com*), in Quarry Bay, also hosts a collection of contemporary art such as acid-coloured dinosaur sculptures by mainland Chinese artist Sui Jianguo.

HOTEL INDIGO HONG KONG ISLAND

The rooms are decorated with art that depicts the historic neighbourhood of Wan Chai. Art



A shopfront in Sheung Wan, a popular art district

lovers are within walking distance of some of the best framers in town, on Queen's Road East. The rooftop features a sky bar and glass-bottomed swimming pool. *Doubles from AED 700; 0085-239-26 3888, ihg.com*

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK ABERDEEN STREET SOCIAL

Aberdeen Street Social is a restaurant, bar and café within the PMQ creative cluster, led by Michelin-starred chef Jason Atherton and designed by Shanghai-based duo Neri

& Hu. Downstairs, casual diners can enjoy drinks, brunch and light meals throughout the day. The restaurant upstairs requires reservations for lunch and dinner. For an inventive cocktail, try the Pea-lini or the Bollywood Remake. *Entrées from AED 140; 0085-228-66 0300, aberdienstreetsocial.hk*

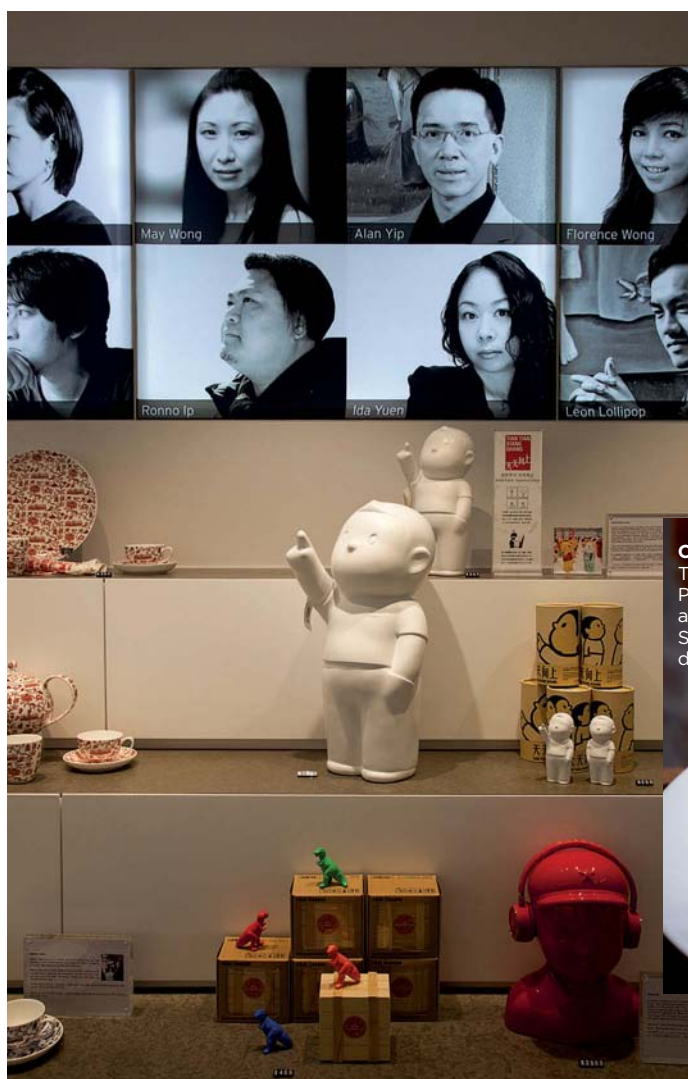
BIBO

This buzzing restaurant and bar occupies a space on Hollywood Road that once belonged to a French tramways company and now ▶



The garden terrace at
Duddell's, a Michelin-starred
Chinese restaurant

**The restaurant takes its
cuisine as seriously as
its cultural contribution
to the community**



Clockwise from left:
The design gallery at PMQ; the reception area of Aberdeen Street Social restaurant; a dessert at Bibò



welcomes guests through a sliding golden door. The interior is filled with original works by artists such as Jean-Michel Basquiat, Jeff Koons and Takashi Murakami, as well as local legends like Tsang Tsou Choi, who called himself the “King of Kowloon”. Follow up one of the ominously named cocktails – Corpse Reviver or Coffin Varnish – with a Wagyu steak tartare for dinner.

Entrées from AED 310; 0085-229-56 3188

DUDELL'S

This Michelin-starred Chinese restaurant and arts club, designed by Ilse Crawford, opened in May 2013. “Duddell’s is the cultural axis around which my days and nights revolve when I’m in Hong Kong,” says Yana Peel. “It takes its cuisine as seriously as its cultural contribution to the community.” The salon upstairs and the garden terrace are great venues for drinks in the evening, after browsing the many art galleries nearby.

Entrées from AED 170; 0085-225-25 9191, duddells.co

MOTT 32

Named after the first Chinese convenience store in New York City, at 32 Mott Street, this Cantonese restaurant is in the basement of the Standard Chartered Bank Building on Des Voeux Road. The cavernous space was designed by Joyce Wang and Maximal Concepts; its look is New York industrial-chic with Chinese imperial details. The Beijing roasted duck is a speciality not to be missed (pre-order by phone or email), but the place is equally famous for its Sichuan dishes.

Entrées from AED 275; 0085-228-85 8688, mott32.com

PING PONG GINTONERÍA

Sai Ying Pun is Hong Kong Island’s latest hipster enclave, with new bars and restaurants seeming to pop up almost every week. The owners of Ping Pong were smart to get in early with this Spanish spirit bar that’s located in a former table tennis hall. (It was the venue for the Gagosian Gallery’s party during Art Basel in 2014.) The signature g&t comes in many variations and is served in a glass goblet with

a single large ice cube. The dress code is casual but flip-flops are not allowed.

0085-291-58 1584, pingpong129.com

SERGE ET LE PHOQUE

Opposite the fruit-sellers of Wan Chai Market is this chic, laid-back French restaurant, a favourite of the city’s art crowd. The interior features white brick walls and mint-green leather banquettes. The food is beautifully prepared, though there’s no menu as such: you order either five or seven courses and the chef takes it from there. For an aperitif, try the house cocktail, which is infused with black cherries. Book for lunch if you’d prefer to enjoy the bustle of the market as you eat.

0085-254-65 2000 CNT

Getting there

Cathay Pacific (cathaypacific.com), Emirates (emirates.com), Etihad (etihad.com) and Qatar Airways (qatarairways.com) fly direct to Hong Kong from the GCC

A mobile installation
of pandas by French
artist Paulo Grangeon



HEART OF LIGHTNESS

A little more than five hours from neon-buzzed Tokyo lies a very different Japan, one of thatched-roof houses and black nights illuminated by lantern light. *PICO IYER* travels to the country's snowy western region to explore two villages untouched by modernity – and alive with their own quiet magic

Photographed by **RANDY HARRIS**

A timeless scene – a brook hugged by banks of snow – at Wanosato

MIGHT ALMOST BE STAYING IN HOBBITLAND. The minute darkness descends and the paper windows under the thatched roofs all around me begin to glow, turning high walls into eerie faces, most of the day's few visitors are gone. Lanterns cast reflections on the rice paddy at the centre of the 20-house village, and the sign warning of nearby bears grows indecipherable in the pitch black. Wandering between A-shaped houses with their steep 60-degree straw roofs – *gassho zukuri*, or “praying hands” in Japanese, though they also look like giant open books – I might be walking through a festive card of occasional lights and tree-trunk seats gathered around a mushroom-shaped low table.

Inside the cosy Yomoshiro guest house, the 14th-generation owner, Kunihiro, serves hearty mountain vegetables and river fish cooked by his cheerful wife, Noriko, around an *irori*, or traditional sunken hearth. He collected some of the vegetables five months ago on slopes filled with antelope, as his ancestors have done since before the United States even existed. Even when the last emperor, Shōwa, ascended the throne in 1926, this village, Ainokura, had barely seen electricity or cars or trains. Offering gunpowder in lieu of tax to local warlords, the villagers used to send oxen, wearing straw sandals and ringing bells, through the mountains to deliver their payment.

As I retire to a simple tatami room in the 240-year-old farmhouse – its main decoration a framed portrait of the last emperor, dead now for 26 years, with his family – I think about how my Japanese wife refused to join me on this trip, so sure was she that we’d be surrounded by ghosts. On the top floor of these three-storey houses was, until recently, a “gallery” for raising silkworms; under the ground floor was the mix of dirt and millet and mugwort and grass and buckwheat and silkworm droppings that would be turned into black gunpowder. In 27 years of living in Japan, I’ve seldom felt so far from fluorescent lights and Western fashions.

“SNOW COUNTRY” HAS LONG BEEN A TALISMANIC phrase in the Japanese lexicon; it speaks of a purer, simpler world where city dwellers can go to cleanse their souls and be returned to something unfallen within themselves. In truth, the coldest parts of Japan are further north, but nowhere is snow country more picturesquely represented than in the thatched cottages of the Gokayama district (in which Ainokura hides), and of Shirakawago, an hour away by bus, tucked into the mountains of central Japan like a forgotten promissory note. Here, people still trudge through midwinter drifts 15ft deep, in snow

sandals and coats made of straw; when I look at the laminated cards the owners of Yomoshiro keep on hand for explaining local terms to foreigners, I see the characters for stinkbug and ostrich fern, for beefsteak geranium and long-nosed goblin’s footprint.

In his classic 1948 novel, *Snow Country*, the Nobel Prize-winning writer Yasunari Kawabata conjures up the romance of a sealed, almost posthumous world of blind masseuses and roads cut off each year until May, where “there was drab poverty in the scene, and yet under it there lay an urgent, powerful vitality”; the pulse and tingle of the book come from waiting to see whether a visiting dilettante from Tokyo will corrupt the enigmatic country girls he meets in a hot-springs resort before they, in their innocence,

redeem him. Around the same time, the Tokyo news photographer Hiroshi Hamaya started chronicling the New Year’s dances and praying children of snowbound villages, going so far as to burn most of his negatives of Tokyo in a rural bonfire. When his book, also called *Snow Country*, came out in 1956, it spoke for a vanishing world of tradition and community, one that held a special magic for Japanese displaced by years of war and post-war reconstruction.

Way back in 1185, it is said, the Taira clan from Kyoto fled to the remote mountains around Gokayama after a terrible defeat in the Dan-no-Ura war. Cut off from the world, they preserved in their hidden sanctuary memories and customs from the court 125 miles away, even as they fell into abeyance elsewhere▶

THE CROWNING GRACE OF THE AREA IS THE PRETTY BOUTIQUE TOWN OF TAKAYAMA. MORE SEDUCTIVE AND FOREIGNER-FRIENDLY THAN ALMOST ANYWHERE ELSE IN JAPAN, IT’S A TREASURE-HOUSE OF JAZZ BARS, STYLISH GALLERIES AND CRAFTS SHOPS



The proprietress at Magoemon, a farmhouse turned inn in Shirakawago

Konbu-based broth with mushrooms, tofu and greens, simmering in an earthenware bowl, is typical of the Japanese cold-weather cooking found in these villages





Dinner at Wanosato.
Right: Fresh tuna and
 salmon roe sashimi – at
 wintertime favourites – at
 Hidatei Hanaougi



(one folk song still performed in Gokayama is said to date back 1,400 years). All too symbolically, in addition to gunpowder and silk – such an archetypal Japanese combination – the villages of Gokayama and Shirakawa-go became famous for producing *yukyu-shi*, or handmade mulberry paper on which, people say, ink remains legible for a thousand years.

Yet as Japan started to prosper in the Sixties, more and more locals abandoned the hard, labour-intensive life of traditional trades and straw-roofed homes for city jobs and washing machines and cars. In Kawabata's novel, the whistle of the train from Tokyo can often be heard, hauntingly, in the distance. The Japanese government decided that it had to take special measures to preserve the traditional settlements, almost as if they were a reminder to the country of where it came from and what gave it fibre. Part of the beauty of those little houses on terraced plateaus, after all, was that up to 30 members of a single family lived under the same roof; when a straw thatch needed replacing – every 15 or 20 years – the entire village pitched in, completing the task in a day.

After UNESCO declared Gokayama and Shirakawa-go World Heritage Sites in 1995, their preservation seemed guaranteed, even though – as Yomoshiro's proprietors tell me wistfully – young people keep fleeing to the

city (even as many in the city long to go “back to nature”). When, every January and February, the houses of Shirakawa-go are illuminated after dark, tour buses crowd in to see a fairyland brought to life, a vision of what my wife calls “the true Japan”. In a country where it's common to find the raw and the cooked, the very rustic and the extremely refined, all over one another in a chaotic mix, this is the rare area where you can see both cool and warmth in their essential forms, side by side.

ON MY RECENT TRIP TO THE GASSHO ZUKURI, I decided to start in the heart of stillness and then move out toward civilisation. I boarded a “Thunderbird Express” train at Kyoto's Platform 0 (what could be more Harry Potter-ish?), and got out 150 minutes later at the shuttered town of Takaoka. Thirty minutes later, a “World Heritage” bus that plies the mountain roads four times a day pulled up and drove me and just three other foreigners into a classic landscape of thick green forests and heavy mist. Cars had their headlights on at 1.30 in the afternoon, as threads of cloud veiled and unveiled the single-lane highway. Then we passed through a long tunnel – and another – and came out, as in Kawabata's novel, into a realm of mossy emerald paths and weathered Shinto shrines.

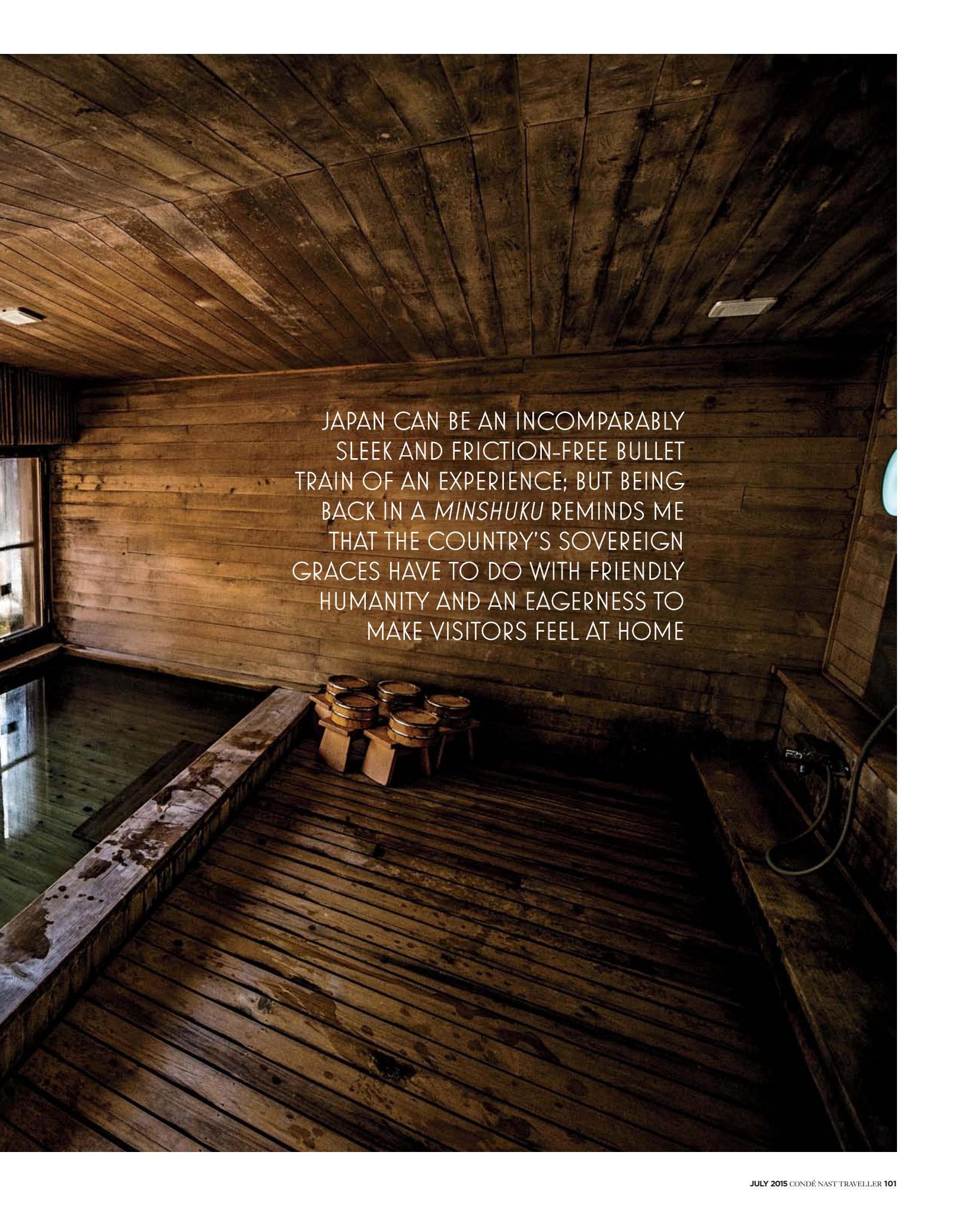
Ainokura proved as quiet and authentic a way to experience village life as I had hoped for; but to see the praying roofs in a more dramatic (and somewhat manicured) pattern, the place the tour groups congregate is Ogimachi, in Shirakawa-go, where local authorities have brought in 117 farmhouses from around the region to create a picture-postcard folk village along a river. Signs point to a “Home Made Restaurant”, and crowds of Chinese visitors slurp buckwheat ice cream around a coffee house with a replica of Rodin's *The Thinker* at its entrance; it's not quite real, but on a singing autumn day of blazing light and warmth, few settlements could be more scenic.

Around the showpiece houses of Shirakawa-go, and Ainokura Traditional Crafts Museum, you can glimpse traditions from three centuries ago, and see the straw baskets made for cats to sleep in and the *sasara* hand-drums comprising 108 thinly sliced wooden blocks, to represent the 108 worldly desires that Buddhism seeks to drive out. Elsewhere in the area are bamboo blocks whose regular *thunks* kept wild boars away, and sleds used for transporting the sick across the snow.

The final, crowning grace of the area is the pretty boutique town of Takayama, an hour from Shirakawa-go, and more seductive and foreigner-friendly than almost anywhere else ▶



The *ofuro*, or hot tub, at Wanosato



JAPAN CAN BE AN INCOMPARABLY
SLEEK AND FRICTION-FREE BULLET
TRAIN OF AN EXPERIENCE; BUT BEING
BACK IN A *MINSHUKU* REMINDS ME
THAT THE COUNTRY'S SOVEREIGN
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in Japan. Takayama has its own cluster of traditional houses 10 minutes from the train station, but really its beauty lies in its narrow lanes of two-storey wooden houses of the kind that have disappeared almost everywhere else. Takayama is a treasure-house of jazz bars and stylish galleries and crafts shops; even the 7-Elevens here are elegant latticed-wood structures. As you walk into the hills 10 minutes from the old quarter, rich with 13 temples and parks made for strolling, you hear running water wherever you go; above the river winding through the centre of town, a series of shapely bridges turns the bustling city into a garden.

At the Hidaitei Hanaougi *ryokan* – in this part of Japan it makes sense to stay in a traditional inn – I find a red origami crane next to the six-course breakfast I'm served; hours later, I'm devouring an unexpectedly tasty three-course lunch (for AED 57) in a French bistro called Mieux, culminating in a gossamer-soft peach sorbet. A gentle walk away from the quaint streets of the old town, I chance upon the Yoshijima Heritage House, a sake brewer's home built 107 years ago, and find myself in a dazzle of *shoji* screens and bare tatami rooms, sunlight streaming in under the high rafters. Windows are pulled back to afford glimpses of the first reddening maples in a tiny garden; the light filtered through the paper windows makes abstract expressionist patterns across the tatami. I'm so transformed by the scene – the most beautiful house I can remember seeing in Japan – that I have to return the next day to watch the light work new designs across the thinly lacquered beams and pillars.

Many visitors look in on Ainokura and Shirakawa-go on an easy day-trip from Takayama, returning to the town of dainty curlicues and cosmopolitan restaurants for the evening. But I was very glad to have spent one night in a thatched farmhouse, letting the silence seep into my bones. Japan can be an incomparably sleek and friction-free bullet train of an experience; but being back in a *minshuku*, or family-run guest house, reminds me that the country's sovereign graces have to do with friendly humanity and an eagerness to make visitors feel at home – even if laminated cards are needed to explain what kind of celery you're eating.

In his classic essay on the power of deep eaves and heavy shadows, the novelist Jun'ichiro Tanizaki wrote, "We Orientals love things that bear the marks of grime, soot and weather, and we love the colours and the sheen that call to mind the past that made them. Living in these old houses among these old objects is in some mysterious way a source of peace and repose". Not only "Orientals", I thought; the dark silences of these high, mysterious, ancient houses could open up space in anyone who enters. **CNT**



A traditional hearth at Wanosato *ryokan* in Takayama

NEED TO KNOW

WHERE TO STAY

BENIYA MUKAYU

An elegant, refined 17-room inn a little over two hours from Takayama, near the Yamashiro *onsen* (hot springs); every room comes with its own open-air bath. Doubles from AED 2,050; 0081-761-77 1340, mukayu.com

HIDATEI HANAUGI

This *ryokan* has a hot spring on the property.

Doubles from AED 760 (per person) including breakfast and dinner; 0081-577-36 2000, www.hanaougi.co.jp

MAGOEMON

For a thatched-house experience in Shirakawa-go.

Doubles from AED 220; 0081-576-96 1167

WANOSATO

A luxe *ryokan* a short drive from central Takayama.

Doubles from AED 1,030; 0081-577-53 2321, ryokancollection.com

YOMOSHIRO

A guest house in the *gassho zukuri* style. Doubles from AED 590; 0081-763-66 2377

WHERE TO EAT

HEIANRAKU

An inexpensive foreigner-friendly place; especially good for vegetarians.

Entrées from AED 34; 0081-577-32 3078

BISTRO MIEUX

A pleasant French bistro on the main drag in Takayama, with reasonable *teishoku* (three-course) sets available at lunchtime.

Entrées from AED 30; 0081-577-36 0149

WHAT TO DO

FUJI FOLK MUSEUM

Contains a private collection of folk art from Japan, China and Korea.

0081-577-35 3778

HIDA FOLK VILLAGE

A pleasant open-air museum featuring 30 traditional farmhouses.

0081-577-34 4711, hidanosato-tpo.jp

KUSAKABE HERITAGE HOUSE

A high-raftered merchant's house from the Edo era, in a picturesque part of Takayama. 0081-577-32 0072

SHIRAKAWA-GO FOLK VILLAGE

A UNESCO World Heritage Site, it's also a living town rather than a museum.

0081-576-96 1311, shirakawa-go.org

YOSHIJIMA HERITAGE HOUSE

A merchant's mansion reconstructed during the Meiji period, near Kusakabe Heritage House.

0081-577-32 0038

ESSENTIAL READING

Snow Country is Yasunari Kawabata's classic portrayal of a love affair between an urban dilettante and a local geisha, during his stay at one of the remote hot springs in Western Japan, in the town of Yuzawa. Illustrating the isolated lifestyle of snowy, rural Japan.

Getting there

Emirates (emirates.com) and Qatar Airways (qatarairways.com) fly direct to Osaka, from where it's an hour's drive to Kyoto, a good point from which to catch a train



Get the look

Pack right for this month's destinations

BOTTEGA VENETA PRE-FALL '15

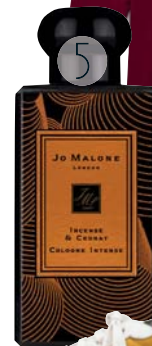


BERLUTI S/S '15



HONG KONG

Your look is your canvas, so make a statement with bold hues, multi-tone shoes and graphic prints in this emerging art hub



1 Sweater, AED 3,380, **Lanvin** 2 Earrings, AED 3,500, **Giuseppe Zanotti**
3 MAC Wash & Dry Tinted Lipglass, AED 100 4 Bag, AED 4,865, **Miu Miu**
5 Heels, AED 2,950, **Charlotte Olympia** 6 Agenda, AED 750, **Aspinal of London** 7 Skirt, AED 900, **Zena Presley**

1 Jacket, AED 3,510, **Freemans Sporting Club** at mrporter.com 2 Scarf, AED 195, **Banana Republic** 3 Sweater, AED 960, **Canali** 4 Trousers, AED 240, **COS** 5 Jo Malone Incense & Cedar Cologne Intense, AED 830 6 Sneakers, AED 2,990, **Christian Louboutin** 7 Trunk, AED 118,830, **Ethan K**



EMILIO PUCCI S/S '15



LACOSTE S/S '15



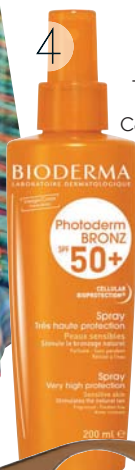
2



2

KRABI

The landscapes of this dreamy province call for gossamer summer dresses, playful printed trunks and footwear you can slip right out of



4



3



4



5



6



7



5



6



7

1 Hat, AED 220, **BCBG Max Azria** 2 Tribal necklace, AED 1,290, **Rada** at Etoile La Boutique 3 Dress, AED 995, **Bebe** 4 Bioderma Photoderm Bronz SPF 50+ Spray, AED 119 5 Sandals, AED 1,650, **Ivy Kirzhner** at Saks Fifth Avenue 6 Sunglasses, AED 1,100, **Versace** 7 Swimsuit, AED 3,450, **La Perla**

1 Wash bag, AED 2,500, **Gucci** 2 Swimming trunks, AED 370, **Thomas Pink** 3 Chevron shirt, AED 760, **CWST** at West LA 4 Tote bag, AED 1,015, **Marc by Marc Jacobs** 5 Shorts, AED 395, **Brooks Brothers** 6 Sandals, AED 1,038, **Dsquared2** at stylebop.com 7 My Colors woven-leather double wrap bracelet, AED 790, **Tod's**



WORDS: RICK JORDAN PHOTO: AMES TYE/IMAGEBRIEF



Where are you?

Happy birthday. But how old would you have to be for several thousand lanterns to be lit in your honour? This colourful display can be seen in a temple that teeters on a precipice halfway up a 740m mountain. Reaching the top will certainly put you on the right track for attaining enlightenment, and many people do: the peak is so close to a capital city there's a subway station right next to it, surrounded by stalls selling silky, homemade tofu, and weekend hikers often have to form an orderly queue. Mountain climbing in this country is a social occasion, the chance to see friends and family and stop off for a picnic. Trails weave around the rocks like noodles, and most are relatively easy, with ropes and railings to hold on to, taking walkers past unusual stone formations and carved statues. A few shots of homemade rice-grape, sold by vendors at the base, may make it tougher to reach the top. The mountain is part of a national park that is also home to a botanical garden, containing irises and azaleas almost as brightly coloured as the paper lanterns. Where are you?

PRIZE

Email your answer identifying the mountain and city where this photograph was taken to contest@appgulf.com and you could win a three-night stay for two at Rome Cavalieri, Waldorf Astoria Hotels & Resorts. See overleaf for details and look out for the answer in the September issue.

CONTEST

WIN A THREE-NIGHT STAY FOR TWO AT ROME CAVALIERI, WALDORF ASTORIA HOTELS & RESORTS

Situated in a 15-acre private Mediterranean park, overlooking Rome and the Vatican City, Rome Cavalieri is a sprawling resort of 370 keys, with timeless architecture and an enviable art collection that includes works by Andy Warhol and Robert Indiana as well as tapestries, period furniture, statues and artefacts. The Penthouse Suite is accessorised with furniture that Karl Lagerfeld originally designed for his Parisian home.

The Cavalieri Grand Spa Club occupies over 2,500sqm of pampering, relaxation and wellness space and boasts La Prairie facials, Ayurvedic massages and an amethyst Turkish bath. The property also features three outdoor pools, a glass-domed indoor pool, two floodlit Davis Cup tennis courts, a state-of-the-art fitness centre and unique experiences like gladiator training.

Guests can enjoy panoramic views of the Eternal City from acclaimed chef Heinz Beck's La Pergola restaurant & bar, the only hotel-restaurant in Rome with three Michelin stars. Located on the rooftop terrace, it serves Mediterranean cuisine and has an extensive grape list. For a menu with an international selection, head down to L'Uliveto, overlooking the landscaped garden.

To win a three-night stay for two at Rome Cavalieri, including daily breakfast, a dinner for two at L'Uliveto and a couple's spa treatment at Cavalieri Grand Spa Club, correctly identify the location of this issue's **Where are you?** competition before July 31, 2015.

Reservations are subject to availability. The prize is valid through July 31, 2016, is non-transferable, cannot be redeemed for cash and does not include public holidays. Flights, transfers, mini bar and all other expenses not stated in this prize are subject to payment either on consumption or departure. For more information, call 0039-06-3 5091 or visit romecavalieri.com



From top: The Deluxe Room with Rome View features a spacious balcony overlooking the city; three-Michelin-starred La Pergola by Heinz Beck

WINNER: MAY 2015

The winner of May's

Where are you? competition is **Karen Ann Rodrigues** of Abu Dhabi who correctly identified the location of the photo as Jade Dragon Snow Mountain in the Yunnan province, China. She won a three-night stay for two at Park Hyatt Abu Dhabi Hotel & Villas



COMPETITION RULES 1. Entries for Condé Nast Traveller's Where are you? competition should be sent via email to: contest@appgulf.com 2. Winners will be judged at the discretion of Condé Nast Traveller. The decision of the judges will be final and binding. No correspondence will be entertained. Only one correct answer will be registered per entrant per issue. 3. Each entry must arrive no later than July 31, 2015. Winners will be contacted by email or telephone whenever possible. 4. The entries must be in English and complete in all respects. 5. Condé Nast Traveller is not responsible for late entries. Illegible or mechanically produced entries are not eligible. Entries by text message are not eligible. 6. Prizes will not be transferred or exchanged for cash or any other item. No refunds or credits for changes or cancellations are allowed. All other expenses and costs, which are not specified as being included in the prize, are the sole responsibility of the winner. 7. All prizes must be redeemed prior to the expiry date. 8. Taxes, if any, are the sole responsibility of the winner. 9. The Where are you? competition is open to readers of Condé Nast Traveller aged 18 and over on the date of entry and who are ordinarily residents of the GCC. 10. Employees of Condé Nast Traveller (Arab Publishing Partners), ITP, participating promotional agencies, contributors to Condé Nast Traveller, and the families of any of those above are not eligible to contest. 11. All entries to the Where are you? competition become the sole property of Condé Nast Traveller and will not be acknowledged nor returned. 12. Entries become the property of Condé Nast Traveller and may be used for such purpose and in such media as the company deems fit, without requiring the participant's prior permission. 13. Acceptance of the prize constitutes consent for the use of the winner's name and likeness and those of his/her travelling companion for editorial, advertising and publicity purposes. 14. Condé Nast Traveller will not be liable for any loss, damage or expense incurred by a prize winner or by his/her travelling companion (for example, costs of repatriation) as a consequence of any party participating in providing the prize becoming insolvent or entering into liquidation or bankruptcy. 15. Condé Nast Traveller reserves the right to amend any or all of the terms of this contest, or the prizes on offer, at any time without prior notice. 16. Contestants, by entering the competition, agree to be bound by the above rules, terms and conditions.

COMING
NEXT MONTH...

**A focus on islands & beaches,
including Malta's design makeover**

PLUS

**The Nordic food movement
lands in Iceland**

**Your ultimate Maldives
resort guide**

Malta's Grand Harbour
viewed from the
Upper Barrakka
Gardens in Valletta

The experts

Travel wisdom from those in the know



Enjoy the fresh mountain air and your own company in the Cairngorms National Park

What's a good destination for solo travel?



CHAITALI COSTA

Director, I Love Adventures, Dubai

"Travelling solo yet not alone is a trend fast gaining popularity. Joining a small group of people at your destination is a solution for those in search of new adventures with the benefit of meeting like-minded people on a similar quest. A popular destination from the GCC is **Vietnam**. You can trek the Mai Chau area, cycle through small towns for an authentic insight into local life and kayak through Halong Bay's towering limestone karsts. No visit is complete without staying overnight on a junk boat in Halong Bay. The Jasmine Junk, a Thirties Indochine-style boat, provides the ultimate in boutique cruising and serves authentic Vietnamese cuisine. There's also growing interest in **South America** – be it the amazing wildlife of the Galápagos Islands, the colossal peaks of Patagonia or the soft silence of an Ecuadorian cloud forest, enjoyed on your own or with others."



OLIVER PILCHER

Travel & fashion photographer, London

"When I travel on my own, I can fill my days, but in the evenings I need a nice pub or restaurant where I can sit in the corner with a local hops, well-sourced food and a decent book, and watch the world go by. In Moray Firth in the **Highlands of Scotland**, solo travellers can fill their time with long, reflective walks on the golden sands at Roseisle or Culbin Bay or follow the beautiful Findhorn and Spey rivers as they wind their way down to the coast from the Cairngorms mountain range. The Kimberly Inn, Findhorn is perched on the coastline overlooking Culbin Forest, and during summer evenings you can sit on the front steps and watch ospreys plucking trout and salmon from the calm, mirrored waters of Findhorn Bay. A good fish and chips or a bowl of mussels is a must and the friendly landlord John Kessel will chat with you into the long hours."



KATE McCULLEY

Travel blogger at adventurouskate.com, Global

"When travelling solo, you want a destination that is easy to navigate, has a strong tourism infrastructure and has little-to-no language barrier. **Iceland** is a stunning country with some of the world's most otherworldly landscapes, from the Jökulsárlón glacier lagoon to the Kirkjufellsfoss waterfall. English is spoken by virtually all Icelanders and there are hundreds of activities to try throughout the island, from hiking glaciers and diving in neon-blue waters to horseback riding through lava fields and relaxing in the Blue Lagoon. Joining activities like these is a great way to meet people, as is exploring Reykjavik's rocking nightlife. To maximise your time, rent a car and drive the Ring Road circling the island. Be sure to feast on puffin or the infamous *hákarl* (fermented shark), which even Gordon Ramsay couldn't keep down."

Stockists

FASHION

Alexander McQueen Dubai, 00971-4-339 8760; Doha, 00974-4-495 3876; Kuwait City, 00965-2-575 7739/48

Aurélie Bidermann at Net-A-Porter: net-a-porter.com

Banana Republic Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-443 7006; Dubai, 00971-4-339 8462; Doha, 00974-4-450 7965; Kuwait City, 00965-2-259 7328

BCBG Max Azria Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-622 3503; Dubai, 00971-4-399 7232; Doha, 00974-4-450 7082; Kuwait City, 00965-2-259 7069; Jeddah, 00966-12-215 0551; Riyadh, 00966-11-211 1650

Bebe Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-681 1379; Dubai, 00971-4-434 0614; Manama, 00973-3-960 5212; Kuwait City, 00965-2-220 0644; Jeddah, 00966-12-215 1551; Riyadh, 00966-5-9120 0277

Brooks Brothers Dubai, 00971-4-295 0159; Jeddah, 00966-12-694 3874; Kuwait City, 00965-2-434 2263

Canali Dubai, 00971-4-330 8334; Muscat, 00968-24-56 4071; Doha, 00974-4-483 2050; Kuwait City, 00965-2-243 2384; Jeddah, 00966-12-692 6563; Riyadh, 00966-11-201 1320

Charlotte Olympia Dubai, 00971-4-399 4122

Christian Louboutin Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-412 4030; Dubai, 00971-4-399 0998; Doha, 00974-4-450 7004; Manama, 00973-1-717 8076; Kuwait City, 00965-2-297 9011; Jeddah, 00966-12-261 0304; Riyadh, 00966-11-211 2819

COS Dubai, 00971-4-388 2072; Kuwait City, 00965-2-208 1203

CWST at West LA: Dubai, 00971-4-394 4248

Dior Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-681 7477; Dubai, 00971-4-330 8739; Doha, 00974-4-413 4665; Manama, 00973-1-753 4160; Kuwait City, 00965-2-297 9021; Riyadh, 00966-11-211 2452

Dsquared2 at Stylebop: stylebop.com

Dunhill Dubai, 00971-4-434 0403; Doha, 00974-4-442 9900; Manama, 00973-1-758 1999; Kuwait City, 00965-2-249 8611; Riyadh, 00966-11-810 2632

Ethan K at Bloomingdale's: Dubai, 00971-4-350 5333

Fendi Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-681 3553; Dubai, 00971-4-339 9782; Manama, 00973-1-332 0505; Jeddah, 00966-12-284 2803; Riyadh, 00966-11-462 6098

Freemans Sporting Club at Mr Porter: mrporter.com

Gucci Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-681 6844; Dubai, 00971-4-339 8953; Doha, 00974-4-421 7824; Kuwait City, 00965-2-530 9997; Jeddah, 00966-12-668 7034; Riyadh, 00966-11-211 2627

Hermès Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-575

9556; Dubai, 00971-4-351 1190; Doha, 00974-6-601 1882; Manama, 00973-1-753 5519; Kuwait City, 00965-2-227 0215

Illesteva at Boutique 1: Dubai, 00971-4-425 7888

Ivy Kirzhner at Saks Fifth Avenue: Dubai, 00971-4-501 2700; Manama, 00973-1-717 2000

J.M Weston Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-681 2507; Dubai, 00971-4-339 8701

Khaleda Rajab & Fahad Almarzouq at Boutique 1: Dubai, 00971-4-425 7888

La Perla at Net-A-Porter: net-a-porter.com

Lanvin Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-677 1180; Dubai, 00971-4-330 8008; Doha, 00974-4-413 4765; Kuwait City, 00965-2-220 0590; Jeddah, 00966-12-661 2812; Riyadh, 00966-11-288 5455

L.G.R at Private Collection: Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-447 1267; Dubai, 00971-4-357 3573; Doha, 00974-4-002 0999

Linda Farrow at s*uce On-Sea: Dubai, 00971-4-430 4202

Louis Vuitton Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-681 2166; Dubai, 00971-4-330 8060; Doha, 00974-4-413 4931; Manama, 00973-1-753 7543; Kuwait City, 00965-2-220 0522; Riyadh, 00966-11-211 2705

Marc by Marc Jacobs Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-650 3338; Dubai, 00971-4-339 8781; Manama, 00973-1-717 9541; Kuwait City, 00965-2-259 7667; Jeddah, 00966-12-275 4663; Riyadh, 00966-11-463 3069

Melissa Odabash at Matches Fashion: matchesfashion.com

Miu Miu Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-681 4920; Doha, 00974-4-464 4082; Kuwait City, 00965-2-530 9780

Mochi allthingsmochi.com

Montblanc Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-645 4765; Dubai, 00971-4-330 4810; Muscat, 00968-2-455 8079; Doha, 00974-4-467 4920; Manama, 00973-1-717 9696; Kuwait City, 00965-9-921 5802; Jeddah, 00966-12-215 0891; Riyadh, 00966-11-211 1080

Mulberry Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-410 4010; Dubai, 00971-4-325 3882; Doha, 00974-4-478 8285; Kuwait City, 00965-2-259 7790

Nathalie Trad nathalietrad.com

Orlebar Brown at Boutique 1: Dubai, 00971-4-425 7888

Proenza Schouler at Boutique 1: Dubai, 00971-4-425 7888

Ralph Lauren Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-626 6734; Dubai, 00971-4-330 8005; Doha, 00974-4-451 7057; Manama, 00973-1-711 2720; Kuwait City, 00965-2-220 0631; Jeddah, 00966-12-211 2513; Riyadh, 00966-11-211 2513

Shamak at Namshi: namshi.com

Sretsis at s*uce On-Sea: Dubai, 00971-4-430 4202

00971-4-351 1190; Doha, 00974-6-601 1882; Manama, 00973-1-753 5519; Kuwait City, 00965-2-227 0215



Barefoot Bookshop in Colombo, Sri Lanka

Thomas Pink Dubai, 00971-4-339 8598

Tumi Dubai, 00971-4-339 8536; Jeddah, 00966-12-275 4676

Versace Dubai, 00971-4-339 8285; Doha, 00974-4-447 7333; Manama, 00973-1-753 6663; Jeddah, 00966-12-261 1172; Riyadh, 00966-11-419 6096

Victoria Beckham at Net-A-Porter: net-a-porter.com

Zena Presley at Harvey Nichols: Dubai, 00971-4-409 8888; at Blush Boutique: Manama, 00973-1-332 0000

BEAUTY

Bioderma at Boots: Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-492 6597; Dubai, 00971-4-419 0518; Doha, 00974-4-411 8784; Manama, 00973-1-717 9852; Kuwait City, 00965-2-495 4609 / 249 5461; Jeddah, 00966-12-263 4622; Riyadh, 00966-11-452 0636

Chanel Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-681 1030; Dubai, 00971-4-382 7100; Kuwait City, 00965-2-299 7700; Jeddah, 00966-12-667 8436; Riyadh, 00966-11-211 2710

Dior at Areej: Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-443 7055; Dubai, 00971-4-340 5223; Muscat, 00968-24-55 8752

Estée Lauder at Debenhams: Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-492 6524; Dubai, 00971-4-340 7575; Doha, 00974-4-483 8913; Manama, 00973-1-717 9887; Kuwait City, 00965-2-495 4600; Riyadh, 00966-11-211 2015

Jo Malone Dubai, 00971-4-419 0519; Doha, 00974-4-451 7020; Kuwait City, 00965-2-283 3087; Riyadh, 00966-11-211 2040

Kieh'l's Dubai, 00971-4-330 8843

L'Occitane Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-681 6691; Dubai, 00971-4-434 2563; Doha, 00974-4-450 7585; Manama, 00973-1-717 9505; Jeddah, 00966-12-215 0672; Riyadh, 00966-11-205 6970

MAC Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-695 8229; Dubai, 00971-4-419 0422; Muscat, 00968-24-47 0581; Doha, 00974-4-413 5069; Manama, 00973-1-758 2757; Kuwait City, 00965-2-224 4706; Jeddah, 00966-12-215 0408; Riyadh, 00966-11-211 2597

Marc Jacobs Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-412 4025; Dubai, 00971-4-341 1202; Doha, 00974-4-413 4767; Jeddah, 00966-12-261 1800;

00971-4-339 8598

00971-4-339 8536; Jeddah, 00966-12-275 4676

00971-4-339 8285; Doha, 00974-4-447 7333; Manama, 00973-1-753 6663; Jeddah, 00966-12-261 1172; Riyadh, 00966-11-419 6096

00971-2-667 4005; Dubai, 00971-4-341 3117; Doha, 00974-4-432 0753; Kuwait City, 00965-2-530 9965; Riyadh, 00966-11-462 3032

00971-2-667 4005; Dubai, 00971-4-341 3117; Doha, 00974-4-432 0753; Kuwait City, 00965-2-530 9965; Riyadh, 00966-11-462 3032

00971-2-667 4005; Dubai, 00971-4-341 3117; Doha, 00974-4-432 0753; Kuwait City, 00965-2-530 9965; Riyadh, 00966-11-462 3032

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00971-2-667 4005; Dubai, 00971-4-341 3117; Doha, 00974-4-432 0753; Kuwait City, 00965-2-530 9965; Riyadh, 00966-11-462 3032

Riyadh, 00966-11-463 3069

Nina Ricci Dubai, 00971-4-330 8789

Prada Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-491 9287; Dubai, 00971-4-501 6990; Doha, 00974-4-464 4908; Kuwait City, 00965-2-530 9782

See by Chloé at Net-A-Porter: net-a-porter.com

Valentino at Harvey Nichols: Dubai, 00971-4-409 8888; Kuwait City, 00965-2-228 3008; Riyadh, 00966-11-273 4444

WATCHES & JEWELLERY

Blancpain at Rivoli: Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-681 3035; Dubai, 00971-4-341 3121; Muscat, 00968-2-455 8290; Doha, 00974-4-479 0107

Giuseppe Zanotti Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-667 4005; Dubai, 00971-4-341 3117; Doha, 00974-4-432 0753; Kuwait City, 00965-2-530 9965; Riyadh, 00966-11-462 3032

IWC Schaffhausen Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-681 1557; Dubai, 00971-4-339 8111; Kuwait City, 00965-2-530 9870

Panerai Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-491 9748; Dubai, 00971-4-339 8444; Muscat, 00968-22-00 9993; Doha, 00974-4-451 9866; Manama, 00973-1-743 1166; Kuwait City, 00965-2-227 0218; Jeddah, 00966-12-284 0529; Riyadh, 00966-11-462 6558

Rada at Etoile La Boutique: Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-626 6922; Dubai, 00971-4-341 4166; Kuwait City, 00965-2-220 0524; Jeddah, 00966-12-284 2861

TAG Heuer Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-644 6448; Dubai, 00971-4-339 8555; Doha, 00974-4-411 5969; Manama, 00973-1-758 7075; Kuwait City, 00965-2-259 7606

Timex at Hour Choice: Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-681 2775; Dubai, 00971-4-339 8735

Tod's Dubai, 00971-4-341 3033; Doha, 00974-4-413 4937; Manama, 00973-1-713 1090; Jeddah, 00966-12-284 2862; Riyadh, 00966-11-293 9440

MISCELLANEOUS

Aspinal of London Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-632 7613; Kuwait, 00965-2-220 0740

Leica at Salam Stores: Abu Dhabi, 00971-2-645 6999; Dubai, 00971-4-704 8484; Doha, 00974-4-448 5555

MOST WANTED

A look at what caught our eye this month, from summer stays to exotic accessories



One of a kind

Make holiday packing easy with Trollbeads beaded jewellery that can be effortlessly mixed and matched with different outfits and is now available at the recently launched store in Dubai Festival City. The Danish brand is known for spearheading the original "bead on bracelet" concept, and makes use of raw materials such as 18-carat gold, sterling silver, freshwater pearls and precious stones, with over 600 beads to choose from, each with its own story. As no two beads are the same, you can be sure each Trollbeads bracelet is unique.

00971-50-658 0240, trollbeads.com

BUCKLE UP

Get road-trip ready with Al-Futtaim Motors' new limited-edition vehicles. In celebration of the UAE-based company's 60th anniversary, it has announced the launch of two new cars, the V8 Toyota Land Cruiser and the V8 Land Cruiser Xtreme, limited to just 60 units. With a host of new add-ons, the V8 Land Cruiser is perfect for a driving holiday with a 9in navigation screen with CD/DVD/AUX/USB/Bluetooth plus rear-seat entertainment to keep the whole family happy. The Land Cruiser Xtreme, with its off-road capabilities, is made for a trip into the desert.

00971-4-310 6666, alfuttaimmotors.ae



Summer detox

Escape the summer heat with a refreshing spa day for you and a friend. Indulge in the signature, Arabian-inspired, three-hour Rhassoul Experience at One&Only The Palm Dubai's One&Only Private Spa. The therapists will smooth and soften your skin with a sea salt and oil exfoliation, followed by a nourishing mud wrap. Soothe tense muscles and cleanse your mind and body of stress in the Rhassoul steam followed by a cascading rinse and therapeutic bath, before finishing with a luxurious two-hour treatment of your choice.

AED 2,890 for two; 00971-4-444 1040, thepalm.oneandonlyresorts.com

Bags of style

UAE-based luxury goods brand Feathers has everything you need for a stylish getaway, from an elegant weekend bag with a detachable shoulder strap, to a chic handbag inspired by a design by "Mona Lisa" artist Leonardo da Vinci from 1497 that was never brought to life – until now. The perfect carry-on for an Italian escape.

00971-2-550 7556, feathers-fashion.com



HOT HOTEL

Located in the heart of Beirut, on the Corniche and close to the city's major shopping areas, business district and the lively downtown scene, Le Vendôme Beirut houses a collection of suites and rooms – designed in classic style with a contemporary twist – with sea and city views. The hotel's rooftop restaurant Sydney's serves up delectable dishes like spinach ricotta tortellini, pan-fried salmon and the chef's risotto, accompanied by a panoramic view of the Mediterranean. Revamped by architect Pierre-Yves Rochon, the restaurant's charming French interiors and works by Lebanese digital artist Selim Attieh have made it a popular meeting place for both guests and city residents.

00961-136 9280, levendomebeirut.com

TROPICAL CHARM

Get in the holiday spirit with Pandora's new tropical summer collection featuring graphic palm leaf cut-out jewellery framed by glittering, hand-set cubic zirconias; exotic palm tree, dolphin and serpent charms; and colourful double leather bracelets with ball charms featuring seafoam green and brilliant blue pavé mosaics to reflect the colours of the sky and ocean.

pandora.net



Eid Mubarak

With Eid-al-Fitr fast approaching, escape to the tropics and kick back at Coco Bodu Hithi Maldives, set in a crystalline lagoon, against the backdrop of the Indian Ocean. From July 17 to July 31, enjoy a three-night stay for two at either the beach-front Island Villa (*doubles from AED 11,020*) or the Coco Residence (*doubles from AED 18,365*), which offers an endless view of the ocean. Dine in the comfort of your villa with a complimentary barbecue for two on the deck and enjoy a 10 per cent discount off the relaxing and rejuvenating spa treatments at Coco Spa, which boasts a variety of Asian-themed therapies, all tailored to your needs.

00960-664 1122, cocoboduhithi.com

Room with a view

CHINA MANDARIN ORIENTAL PUDONG, SHANGHAI



The 468m Oriental Pearl Radio & TV Tower houses the Shanghai History Museum, a theatre for cultural performances, a transparent observatory as well as shopping and dining spots

ROOM 1801

From the comfort of your leather armchair (or the hotel's signature circular bathtub) relish the cinematic vistas through the wide, floor-to-ceiling windows of this Mandarin River View Room. The scenic panorama includes the Oriental Pearl Radio & TV Tower, an iconic part of Shanghai's futuristic skyline, and the Huangpu River, which reflects the city lights across its surface come nightfall. For a different perspective, the spa is built around a landscaped garden: After a Chinese Meridian Massage that balances your *qi*, sip tea while gazing upon an enclosed bamboo grove.

Doubles from AED 1,070; Room 1801 from AED 1,300; 0086-212-082 9888, mandarinoriental.com/shanghai

WORDS: YARA BORAIE

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